



JEKKA McVICAR

# grow herbs

An inspiring guide to  
growing and using herbs

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# grow **herbs**







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JEKKA McVICAR







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PUBLISHER Jonathan Metcalf  
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**Author's note** Herbs contain natural medicinal properties and should be treated with respect. This book is not intended as a medical reference book, but as a source of information. Do not take any herbal remedies if you are undergoing any other course of medical treatment without seeking professional advice. Before trying herbal remedies, sample a small quantity first to establish whether there is any adverse or allergic reaction. Do not attempt self-treatment for serious or long-term problems without consulting a qualified medicinal herbalist. Neither the author nor the publisher can be held responsible for any adverse reactions to the recipes, recommendations, and instructions contained herein, and the use of any herb or derivative is entirely at the reader's own risk.





*In loving memory of William*

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# INTRODUCTION



# What is an herb?

The answer to the apparently simple question “What is an herb?” is more complicated than you might think. The Royal Horticultural Society’s definition of an herb, according to its Dictionary of Gardening, is “a plant of which the stem dies to the ground at the end of the season.” This definition seems to me too narrow, considering that some plants I regard as herbs, like bay (*Laurus nobilis*), are evergreen, so I prefer the explanation given in the Oxford English Dictionary, where the term “herb” is applied to plants of which the leaves or stem and leaves are used for medicine, or for their scent or flavor.

## The properties of herbs

Herbs have a history that is steeped in myth and magic and there is much bogus information regarding their potency and properties. But if we put aside the superstitions attached to herbs and concentrate on the many medicinal and culinary benefits they have brought us over the past 1,500 years, we cannot but conclude that they are the most extraordinarily diverse and useful plants. Herbs come in all shapes, sizes, textures, and scents, and they can be incorporated into any size garden or container. You may think of a particular herb like sweet basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) as a delicious cooking herb, only to discover its value in the garden as a companion plant for deterring pests from tomato plants or its ability to act as a fly repellent when planted in pots for the home. The same applies to a herb like chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), which is wonderful in beauty products for lightening hair but is also a healing herb to relieve insomnia when drunk as a tisane.

## The future for herbs

Research into the properties of herbs and how people around the world use these plants is now high on most people’s agenda, and I am aware of an herb revival at a time when we are more knowledgeable about the damaging effects of our lifestyles on our bodies and the environment. I think that there is a new respect for herbs and that they have a vital part to play in a healthier approach to modern living.



**This informal, aromatic herb garden** combines culinary and medicinal herbs with herbaceous perennials.



◀◀ **Foxglove** (*Digitalis purpurea*) is a traditional medicinal herb that has been used since the eighteenth century to treat various heart conditions.

◀ **Narrow-leaved sage** (*Salvia lavandulifolia*) leaves have a strong aromatic flavor in casseroles and stews. They are also good for making an herbal infusion to help the memory.



◀◀ **Lemon balm** (*Melissa officinalis*) has lemon-scented leaves that can be added to salads or made into an infusion to relieve fatigue and tension.

◀ **Purple basil** (*Ocimum basilicum* var. *purpurascens* 'Dark Opal') has highly aromatic leaves that are good eaten raw in salads or added to pasta sauces.



◀◀ **Borage** (*Borago officinalis*) attracts bees and other pollinating insects to the garden, and the seeds are high in polyunsaturated fats.

◀ **Sweet Annie** (*Artemisia annua*) is a natural herbicide and an important medicinal herb used in the treatment of malaria.



# Why grow herbs organically?

**“The organic approach to gardening and farming recognizes that the whole environment in which plants grow is much more than the sum of its individual parts, and that all living things are interrelated and interdependent.”**

– *Garden Organic*

Organic methods and principles respect the environment and work in harmony with nature. Organic gardeners build up the sustainability of the soil by feeding it with home and garden waste. This encourages the microbes in the soil to turn this waste into plant food. The plants flourish and attract beneficial insects for pollination. Seeds are produced, fall to the ground, and in turn grow into new plants. As life is a cycle, so is the garden.



## **Benefits of organic herbs**

Herbs are one of the most beneficial groups of plants to have in the organic garden. Grown without pesticides and chemical fertilizers, organic herbs attract many beneficial insects, as well as bees,

birds, and butterflies to the garden and vegetable plot, achieving a high level of pollination and increased yields. So by growing your herbs organically you not only create a beautiful garden that is teeming with wildlife, but also increase the productivity and the health of the plants you grow. You can enjoy picking and using delicious fresh herbs in cooking without the worry of introducing pesticides into your diet.

I prefer organic herbs because I think that they taste better. Herbs grown in the sun, rain, and soil—rather than on a large scale under artificial lights—contain more nutrients because these environmental elements help boost the natural oil content in the plants. When used in cooking, the organic herbs go further because they have a more intense flavor and a lower water

content. For common ailments, too, organic preparations are less likely than conventional medicines to cause adverse reactions, and many are gentle enough to treat small children and pets. You can also make your own herbal cleaning products, free from synthetic pollutants.

## **The best way forward**

“Organic systems work in harmony with nature, not against it, keeping harmful chemicals out of our land, water, and air, creating a healthy environment.”

—*The Soil Association*

The organic approach to farming was practiced widely until after World War II, when mechanization, a growing population, and the demand for more intensive production and cheaper food increased. However, with the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) scare in Britain and the wider concern about genetically modified (GM) food, we are becoming more aware of the consequences of intensive farming. Organic systems, for me, represent the best way forward. They work with nature, not against it, and growing herbs organically will help keep our environment and our gardens, safe, enjoyable and healthy places to be.



## Balancing the ecosystem

**BENEFICIAL PLANTS** When choosing herbs for your garden, consider what the plant can contribute to the garden. For example chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), as well as making a soothing cup of herb tea, will repel flying insects when planted next to onions, and improve their crop yield. A chamomile infusion can also be sprayed on seedlings to prevent “damping off,” or leaves can be placed on the compost heap to help speed up the process (see page 37).

**COMPANION PLANTING** When planted next to other species, certain herbs will deter pests or have a healing effect. Plant basil next to tomatoes and this will inhibit aphids because the pest prefers basil to tomatoes. Or plant yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) near an ailing shrub or tree and the herb will help the plant rebuild its natural disease resistance.

**ATTRACTING BIRDS** Birds eat pests and insects, so to encourage birds into the garden, plant seed-bearing herbs to give them a supply of food for the winter. For example, evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*) attracts all members of the chickadee and tit family, and elecampane (*Inula helenium*), the finch family.

**BEES AND BUTTERFLIES** Both are good pollinators so plant herbs to attract them. Planting borage (*Borago officinalis*) with runner beans helps increase the yield. Angelica Vicar’s Mead (*Angelica sylvestris* ‘Vicar’s Mead’) is a beneficial late-season nectar plant, so consider growing it in the garden.



# Biodiversity in the garden

All species, no matter how small, have an important role to play in the garden. They are all part of the jigsaw puzzle that is the ecosystem, and just one missing piece can cause disease, the loss of a crop, or even extinction. The preservation of biodiversity—the existence of a wide variety of species in their natural environments—can be critical to the health of our surroundings, and ultimately to that of our planet.

The bee population, in particular, is in severe decline in the Northern Hemisphere. Bees depend upon a flower-rich habitat for food, the loss of which, as a result of the intensification of agricultural systems over the past century, has caused a drop in population levels. This, in turn, means that there are fewer bees to pollinate flowers and maintain the populations of the fruit and vegetables we take for granted. By acting quickly to ensure a balanced environment in the garden, we can help stop this decline.

## What can we do?

We can all contribute to biodiversity—most gardens already play their part, offering a small haven with a combination of habitats, soils, and native and exotic plants, all of which create a unique environment. Even windowboxes make a difference, offering nectar and pollen to bees and butterflies. By adopting some good

general gardening practices, the biodiversity in your garden can be further enhanced. Whatever you choose to do, remember that biodiversity is a fine balance, reliant on complex interactions, and that the tiniest insect, lichen, or fungus can make a huge difference to the natural equilibrium.



◀◀ **Flowering herbs**, like marjoram, are important for their ability to draw bees, providing food for the insect as well as pollinating the plant.

◀ **Oregano's flowers**, in addition to looking beautiful, will benefit many native butterflies.

## Ways to enhance the biodiversity in your garden

Choose a range of plants—annuals, vegetables, shrubs, and trees—that provide a food source over a long period. Include nectar and pollen-rich plants to provide food for bees, butterflies, and other flower-visiting insects. Night-flowering or scented species will benefit moths, and fruiting trees and shrubs give a range of berries for mammals and birds. Where possible, include climbers to provide a nesting habitat for birds. Try to add a few native plants to your selection—these will survive in the local climate and offer a valuable food source.

■ **Delay cutting your hedges** back until the early spring; this will provide a good winter habitat and shelter for birds. Leave a few logs out because dead wood is a great habitat for invertebrates, fungi, birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.

■ **Leave some structural grasses** and perennials, rather than cutting them back in the fall. These will provide a winter food source for birds and mammals, and will enhance the overwintering potential and survival rates of beneficial species.

■ **Follow organic gardening** practices, especially concerning herbicides and pesticides; all insects are an important part of the natural food chain in your garden. The chain also includes beneficial natural predators that would be killed by pesticides, including ladybugs, lacewings, and hoverflies.

■ **Water in a garden is important.** Not only is it essential for birds, but in the spring it will provide a place for amphibians to spawn; they will return the favor by controlling slugs and snails. You need not create a large water feature—a bowl in the ground would suffice.

■ **Reduce the size** of your lawn, or consider leaving part uncut. Long grass is beneficial to many species, and reducing mowing cuts emissions and saves fossil fuels.



**Garden birds** need a year-round food source—help them with a simple feeder like this one. The more wildlife you can attract to your garden, the better.

■ **Turn all or part of your lawn** into a wildflower meadow. This will require careful management but can be hugely rewarding.

■ **Install bird feeders,** bird and bat boxes, solitary bee nests, and ladybug and lacewing homes. Remember that birds should be provided with food and water throughout the year, not just in winter. Many birds will benefit from the wide range of insects, worms, and other invertebrates in your garden.

■ **Think carefully** about the materials that you use in your garden. Consider where, for example, your potting soil, plants, and wooden furniture come from. Are they from sustainable sources, or are their habitats under threat?

■ **Recycle the plant material** in your garden; leaf litter, in particular, makes superb compost. Always check your compost heap for wildlife before disturbing, because compost waste and heaps can provide a valuable wildlife habitat for slow worms and many other invertebrates. Use your own compost instead of peat-based products.

# Managing herbs the natural way

The art of good organic management is constant vigilance. I regularly tour my farm on the lookout for signs of pests or disease. If I see anything, I can act quickly before the problem spreads, either by introducing a predator to control an infestation of pests, or by cutting back the plant if it is diseased.

Another organic but time-consuming method is to remove or squash any pests as you see them. When I first started the farm, the ecosystem was out of balance (as your garden will be in its first year without chemicals) and I had to perform slug patrols at night. If you have previously used slug pellets, pay special attention to that area where you laid pellets because they are designed to

draw slugs to them. If collecting up slugs is not working, introduce the parasitic nematode *Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita*; however, this only works well at temperatures above 40°F (5°C) on moist soil. To control insects like greenfly, try growing a companion plant like buddleia mint to attract hoverfly, whose larvae eat greenfly. Alternatively, collect ladybugs and introduce

## Spring



**Remove moss and weeds** from wintered container plants in spring. This will prevent the weeds from taking over the pot and stop them from taking all the nutrients from the substrate. Also, it allows the wind and rain to get to the plant, which makes a stronger specimen.



**Feed pot-grown herbs** in spring, to encourage the plant to put on new growth. After clearing off all the winter debris and roughing up the surface of the substrate, add a small amount of organic fertilizer to the surface, then lightly cover with new substrate.



**Start controlling pests** from spring onward—pick off any that you see, and look under the canopy of the shrubs to see if there are any slugs. Check containers for vine weevil damage, and repot, removing all contaminated soil. Check the greenhouse or conservatory for whitefly or red spider mite, introducing predators if required to control the problem.

## Summer



**Cut back flowers** of your herb plants in summer to prolong the harvesting season. This is a good idea for soft-leaved herbs like lovage, chives, mint, and lemon balm. After cutting back, give the herbs a liquid feed with comfrey (see page 39), which will encourage rapid new growth to produce a second crop of leaves.



them into the infested area. A diseased plant will drop its leaves onto the soil, so cut out infested or damaged parts of the plant to inhibit the spread of disease. Act quickly, especially in the case of rust, which infects herb plants such as mint, tarragon, and chives. Once the rust spores are in the soil, it is difficult to get rid of them organically (see page 149).

In fall and spring, check the weather forecast for frost. Use horticultural fleece to cover and protect established tender plants and newly emerging seedlings. Before feeding the soil in the fall or spring with well-rotted manure, pick up a handful of soil and smell it. If there is only a faint aroma, the soil is deficient and needs a generous manure feed. Above all else, try to enjoy the work and do not try to fight against nature—go with it.



**Buddleia mint flowers** attract the beneficial hoverfly, which then acts as a predator to blackflies and whiteflies.

## Fall



**Cut back established plants** in early fall to regain shape. Evergreen herbs like thyme, lavender, and cotton lavender benefit from being cut back, not only to stop them from becoming woody and shapeless, but also to protect them from being split apart by adverse weather conditions. It also encourages light new growth for winter protection.



**Lift tender plants** in the fall, to protect them from frost. Small herbs like scented pelargoniums (shown here) are well worth lifting. Cut them back quite hard, pot up using a loam-based substrate, water in, then place the container in a frostfree environment. The plants will then need minimal watering until the following spring.



**Feed established plants** in the garden in the fall. Use either well-rotted manure or well-rotted compost, and dig it in around the established plants, avoiding areas of soft growth. By doing this in the fall, the feed will slowly nourish the soil and at the same time give the roots added protection.

## Winter



**Protect exposed plants** in the garden in winter. Tender plants that have become too large to be moved may need extra protection from inclement weather. Horticultural fleece is ideal. It is light, so it will not damage the plant, and it is permeable so the plant can breathe. On warm days, remove the fleece to allow better air circulation, especially if the fleece has become wet.





# THE GARDEN



# Your garden environment

The key to a successful organic herb garden is to work with nature, and remember that every garden has a unique set of growing conditions that distinguish it from any other, which goes some way to explaining why a neighbor may be able to grow certain plants that you have tried to grow with little success. Perhaps your garden is sheltered by the house and the soil does not get much rain. Or it could be exposed to a prevailing wind that makes the soil drier than the garden next door. Before you plan a new herb garden or redesign an existing one, it is a good idea to familiarize yourself with your plot.

## Assessing the site

When considering the site of your planned herb garden, note down any environmental factors that may influence the herbs you select. Also, the native trees, shrubs, and weeds that are already growing well in the garden or its immediate surroundings offer clues to your soil type. The presence of horsetail and comfrey are signs of a damp, heavy soil, while shrubs like rhododendrons and azaleas indicate acid soil, and beech trees thrive in chalky soil.

Herb gardens, particularly those that feature Mediterranean culinary herbs such as sage, need plenty of sunshine to thrive. Note the position of the sun in relation to the growing beds in the garden. Where does the sun rise, and how does it move across the garden during the course of the day? Which areas of the garden are in permanent shade, and is there anything you can do to improve the situation? Perhaps a shadow is being cast by a large tree that needs pruning.



**A well-planned herb garden** will encourage the plants you choose to thrive, and will be a pleasure to work in.

## Planning a new herb garden

If your proposed herb garden site has been neglected for years, or you are starting a new garden from scratch in a field site—as I did—try to find old maps of the area to give you some background information on what has gone before so that you will have some knowledge about what you can grow there. When I looked at an old Ordnance Survey map of my area, I found that the site was formerly called “clay fields,” so I knew from the outset that I would have to work with heavy clay soil and have to find herbs that could adapt to these conditions, or else work hard to improve the soil. Make lists of herbs that suit your soil, and another list of herbs that suit your position—sun or shade. Once you have these lists, see which herbs overlap between the two—these will be the easiest to grow in your particular site. So, by finding out as much as you can about your site and conditions before you start, you will have all you need to plan a thriving herb garden.



### ◀◀ **Comfrey plants**

(*Symphytum officinale*) growing wild along the edge of the field, signaling heavy soil.

◀ **Hops** (*Humulus lupulus*) are happy climbing up a sheltered wall. Walls protect the soil directly beneath from rain, which is of benefit when growing hops in heavy soil because they favor drier conditions.



### ◀◀ **Tree spinach**

(*Chenopodium giganteum*) and borage (*Borago officinalis*) were found growing on my compost heap, having happily self-seeded in these nutrient-rich conditions.

◀ **Horseradish** (*Armoracia rusticana*) grows on the roadside close to the farm. This is a sign of heavy soil.



### ◀◀ **Elderberry** (*Sambucus nigra*), like horseradish, also

grows along the lane where there is heavy alkaline soil. Elderberry will grow happily in these conditions.

◀ **Horsetail** (*Equisetum arvense*) is an indicator of damp soil because this is the only condition it enjoys. Beware of horsetail—its roots can reach a depth of 6ft (2m).



# Soil analysis

The easiest way to analyze your soil is to pick up a handful, and ask yourself the following questions: does it fall through your fingers, or does it form a solid lump? Does it have a sweet, warm, earthy smell? Or is the soil poor with no odor or even a slightly sour smell? A healthy soil is teeming with life and should have worm channels, which indicate that the soil is aerated and not compacted. Good plant growth is dependent not only on the nutrient content of the soil, but also on its structure. Sandy soil is often low in nutrients because the rain washes them away. Clay soil can be rich in plant food, but heavy and waterlogged, so plant roots find it difficult to establish a foothold. Use bulky organic matter to improve soil structure, to help sandy soil retain water, to aerate clay soil, and generally to produce healthier herb crops.

## Soil condition

The soil is the engine of your garden so it is important to know its condition before you start planting. Check by putting a spade into the soil to see if it has become compacted—if it has, it will need to be dug over prior to planting. Ideally, this should be done in the fall before planting in the following spring, and layered with well-rotted compost to encourage microbes (see page 10).

## Checking the pH

The pH of the soil refers to its acidity or alkalinity. It is a vital factor in the plant's ability to obtain all types of plant foods and essential chemicals via its root system. For example, an alkaline soil can produce stunted plants with yellowing leaves because minerals like iron cannot be absorbed. At a neutral pH of 7, most of the essential chemicals and plant foods become available, producing healthy plants.

## Soil testing

To test your soil, buy a soil-testing kit from a garden center. The majority of amateur soil-testing kits are very simple and rely on color rather than the numerical pH scale. Acid soil turns the indicator orange, neutral turns it green, and alkaline dark green.



**A self-testing kit** is a quick and easy way to check the acidity or alkalinity of your garden's soil.

## Improving soil structure

- All soil improvers can be added as a mulch or dug into the top 6 in (15 cm), which is the main feeding area for the plant roots.
- Stand on a wooden plank while you dig. Do not stand or walk on the soil, since compacted soil has little air, which makes it difficult for the roots to penetrate.
- Dig only when necessary, because overdigging can destroy soil structure.
- Keep the soil covered with mulch to maintain structure.
- Do not overfertilize. The plant will produce lots of lush top growth, but no flowers and therefore no fruit.





## Basic soil types

Soil can vary from acid (pH 3.5) to alkaline (pH 8.5). Most herbs will tolerate a range of 6.5–7.5 pH, which is fairly neutral. Here, I am holding a clay soil in the left of the photo above—the soil particles stick together—and a good quality loam soil in the right. The four basic soil types and their properties are outlined below. They are all suitable for growing herbs, but some may require extra help to ensure successful growing.

**SAND (pH 4.5)** This soil feels gritty. It is free-draining, so plants' nutrients are washed away. One advantage is that it warms up quickly in spring, so sowing and planting can start early. To help retain moisture, feed in winter with leafmold and well-rotted manure.

**LOAM (pH 5.5–8.5)** This is often considered the optimum soil for herb growing. There are various types of loam. A sandy loam is the best for growing

Mediterranean herbs, but herbs like soapwort, comfrey, angelica, valerian, Joe Pye weed, meadowsweet, and loosestrife grow best in moist to marshy loam.

**CLAY (pH 6.5)** This soil has tiny particles that stick together when wet, making the soil heavy and difficult for roots to penetrate. When it is dry, it sets hard. Even though it can be rich in nutrients, improve its structure by working in well-rotted leafmold. This will enable young plants to establish themselves.

**CHALK (pH 8.5)** This soil is light and has lumps of flint or chalk. It drains well and is often shallow in depth. It has a high pH, making it alkaline. Nutrients can be increased with compost, but it is harder to reduce alkalinity. Many herbs tolerate chalk, but for root depth and moisture it may be easier to grow them in raised beds.

# Preparing new beds for planting

The time you spend preparing your new beds before planting will be repaid over the years to come, giving you a bumper harvest. Having fed and dug over the beds the previous fall (see page 20), watch out for the weeds that will appear as soon as the soil warms up in spring—make sure you remove them before planting.

Weeds, especially perennial ones like bindweed, can be persistent and deep-rooted and should be eradicated. Dig heavy soil in early winter after rain, when the top soil is easier to work but before it becomes waterlogged. Frosts will also help erode and break up clods of soil. Leave light soil undug until early spring so that nutrients do not leach out of the soil in wet winter weather. Once

cleared, cover the soil (see below) to inhibit weed seed, which lies dormant until exposed to light. This way you will avoid having to weed the site before planting. When newly planted with young herbs, do not irrigate the area with a spray hose or sprinkler because jets of water can spread weed seed. Use leaky pipes or seep irrigation instead, which also reduce water consumption.

## Plastic sheeting to cover new beds



**1 Cover newly prepared soil** with mulch or plastic sheeting after you have cleared it of weeds. By excluding the light from the soil, you are effectively preventing weed growth. Here, I am using black plastic sheeting (400 gauge), which is excellent for keeping the ground clear before planting. Lay the sheet over the newly prepared soil for a month to exclude light, lock in moisture, and warm up the soil before planting. A permeable membrane like coir matting (see opposite), which allows the soil to breathe and water to permeate, is best as a long-term cover for herb beds.

**2 Anchor plastic sheeting** by burying the edges in soil or under stones or planks to prevent it from lifting in strong winds. Planks are good because they give you access to the site and spread your body weight without compacting the soil structure – which is, after all, what you are trying to improve. Cardboard is another suitable soil cover—place torn-up strips between rows of annual herbs like coriander and dill to inhibit weeds. Cardboard is biodegradable, so when it is no longer useful in the herb bed, break it up and add it to the compost heap (see page 37).

# Preparing existing beds

The best time for maintaining an existing bed is in the spring, when the soil has started to warm up and seedlings are starting to grow. Start by keeping your herb garden as weed-free as possible, which will not only make it easier to see any new seed-raised crops, but will also make it easier to harvest later in the season.

Clear the ground of weeds, add any soil improvers or fertilizers (see pages 36–39), then apply a mulch to inhibit further weed growth. Suppress weeds with a permeable plastic membrane or bark chippings, leafmold, gravel, coir, or cocoa shells. I do not like cocoa shells—they have a strong smell, are environmentally unsound, having been transported across the world, and there is

little information on whether the cocoa bush was sprayed with pesticides. I have similar ecological concerns about excessive use of coir, the coarse fiber from coconut shells, and find it does not break down well. When applying mulch around established plants, always leave some bare soil close to the plant crown and roots to allow air to circulate and prevent rot.

## Mulch and coir matting on mature beds



**1 Spread leafmold mulch** to help improve the soil condition as well as stifling weeds; the mulch in an established garden should be both nutritious and moist. My favorite mulches are leafmold and bark (see page 36) because herb plants prefer these relatively low-nutrient versions. In addition to being of benefit to the soil, a layer of mulch will improve the appearance of the flower bed.



**2 Fit permeable mulch covers** around plants to suppress weeds. Permeable mulches made from fibrous matting materials are also available from garden centers. Fibrous coir matting (shown above) is useful for suppressing weeds around established low-growing herbs, where it is often awkward to weed. The coir mat will also help protect the plant's root system in winter from cold and damp. Avoid old carpet or sacking because they look unattractive and may encourage pests like mice or other rodents that feed on herbs.



# Designing an herb garden

Herbs are very versatile plants, and the pleasure in designing an herb garden is that there is a species of herb to suit every soil type and location. Whether you are planning to give over your entire garden to herbs, or you just want to plant up herbs in individual pots, take time deciding how you want to use your chosen species. Are you growing herbs purely for their color and fragrance? Or do you want to be able to harvest herbs all year round to flavor cooking, or be able to pick herb leaves for use in summer salads? Maybe you just want to grow a selection of medicinally beneficial herbs to make tisanes? Perhaps a combination of these? Whatever you choose to grow in your herb garden, make sure that your design leaves you space to harvest them, and try to choose some herbs that will give your garden structure in the winter months.

## Planning the design

Before you start planting, consider your soil type and which way your garden faces (see page 18 for more information). Plan the best position for each herb plant in the garden design by researching each one's growth habit. Information on specific herbs can be found in my Top 100 herbs (see pages 74–215). Consider height; for example, angelica reaches 8 ft (2.5 m) so it is best placed at the back of the herb bed, while some herbs, such as mint, spread very quickly, so you may wish to grow them in containers instead of the herb bed to keep their growth in check. Another factor is the growing cycle; for example, herbs like wild arugula are short-lived and are only productive for a few months, while others such as box are evergreen and will remain in leaf throughout the year. Also consider which herbs grow well together and make good companion plants. Think of your garden ecosystem, and which herbs attract birds, bees, and butterflies. By their very nature, all herbs are born survivors and self-seed freely. To keep the herb garden looking its best, you will need to maintain it, clipping evergreen foliage to shape and cutting off flowerheads before they run to seed.

If you already have an existing herb garden that you have inherited from a previous owner, do not be afraid to

replace old plants, such as lavender and rosemary that have become woody and are now no longer productive. Equally, if you do not particularly like certain herbs, remove them to create more space for herbs you are eager to grow. Making an existing herb garden your own is an opportunity to grow the plants that you will use most, so do think carefully about the plants you would like to retain and those you would like to replace.

## Sources of inspiration

To help you plan a successful herb garden design, try to visit established herb gardens for inspiration. The Herb Society of America (see Resources) has information on herb gardens that are open to the public. You may be inspired by a Mediterranean-style rockery for herbs like thyme, oregano, sage, and prostrate rosemary, for example. A raised herb bed provides a good solution if your soil type is unsuitable for the herbs you wish to grow; an aromatic border can be planted with low-growing herbs like sage, or an herbaceous border with a mix of other shrubs and trees. Flower shows also offer a wealth of ideas for planting designs, and often have ideas on how to use herb plants to provide structure, or as path edges and hedges. Armed with this information, you will be equipped to make an enthusiastic start.

► **Paths through gardens** give access and make it easier to harvest and tend to the plants.

▼ **Color, variety, and texture** can be seen in our 2009 Gold Medal Chelsea Flower Show display.





# Traditional herb garden design

Herbs have been cultivated for thousands of years as medicine and as a food, and were also planted near temples for use in religious rituals. Today, herbs are grown in beds and as part of formal herb gardens, the design of which reflects their history, as well as in mixed herbaceous borders and incorporated into vegetable gardens. They are grown not only for use in the kitchen but also for their ability to increase biodiversity (see pages 12–13), which attracts pollinating insects to the garden, in turn helping to increase the yield of fruit and vegetables grown in a kitchen garden.

## Herbs in history

By 1066 AD, the custodians of medicinal herbs were European monasteries. After their dissolution herbs became the province of the manor house garden, and by Elizabethan times herb gardens had become very formal. In 1621, the first Botanic Garden in the UK opened at Oxford University, and in 1673 the Chelsea Physic Garden followed. By the 18th century, herbs became an informal part of the flower border and vegetable plot.

**ROMAN** Geometrically precise, Roman herb gardens had raised beds filled with coriander, dill, parsley, rosemary, and fennel. These elaborate formal gardens disappeared during the Dark Ages.

**MEDIEVAL** Monastic gardens were rectangular and divided into four specific areas, with paths running between each bed for easy access. The “physic” area was placed next to the infirmary, and a medicinal plant was grown in each bed. The vegetable garden area also had a system of rectangular beds. The third area contained fruit trees, and the fourth—the kitchen garden—had walled or raised beds.

**TUDOR** Most large houses grew a variety of sweet-smelling herbs to cut for nosegays. The herbs were combined with the flower garden for household use along with vegetables and fruit trees. This developed into the formal knot garden of the Elizabethan era.

**STUART** Formal European garden designs had a major influence during this period. The chief feature of this style were broad avenues, flanked by rectangular parterres made up of formal low hedges. Herbs were often set apart in their own section.

**20TH- AND 21ST-CENTURY DESIGN** Early on, garden designers like Gertrude Jekyll treated herbs like other herbaceous perennials, as shown in the photograph below, and incorporated them into the flower border. By the end of the 20th century, herbs were once again recognized for their own culinary and medicinal merit, and the dedicated herb garden plan has now undergone a huge revival.



**A mixed herbaceous**, herb, and shrub border that was first created by Gertrude Jekyll.



## Herb garden styles

The three main styles of herb garden still exercise their influence on design today. The dedicated physic garden had its origin in medieval monastic gardens; the formal knot garden can be seen at flower shows every year; and the culinary herb garden has become ever more popular.

**PHYSIC** The design of this herb garden is influenced by the monastic gardens. The beds are rectangular and divided by grassy paths, giving access to each area of the garden. Herb beds were carefully ordered and divided up so that each bed was planted with herbs from one family, or with herb plants that healed specific areas of the body such as the head, heart, or the circulatory system.

**FORMAL KNOT** In the early 16th century, knot gardens became fashionable. The feature of this style of planting is that regular geometric and symmetrical patterns are picked out in evergreen herbs like cotton lavender (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*), or hedge germander (*Teucrium x lucidrys*). An “open knot” garden was filled with flowers: a “closed knot” was a more complex pattern with no flowers, but with a sand or brick dust substrate to enhance the pattern. Boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*), was introduced as a hedging plant in the 17th century.

**CULINARY** Over 200 years ago, herbs were a staple food of everyday life. The term herb had many different meanings: vegetables were known as “pot herbs,” because they added bulk to the cooking pot; “salad” (salet) herbs and “sweet” herbs were used for flavoring, and “simples” were medicinal herbs. The culinary herb garden evolved from being primarily a combined vegetable and herb garden, to a garden that now contains mainly evergreen and annual herbs. The design of a culinary herb garden ensures that the plants are easily accessible for picking, so stepping stones or paths running between narrow beds are an important feature.



▲ **Boxwood hedges** (*Buxus sempervirens*) punctuated by columns of clipped yew (*Taxus*) give structure to the garden all year round.



▲ **A modern-day apothecary's garden** with a thyme (*Thymus*) centerpiece; the wide paths give shape and ease of access.

# Formal versus informal design

Every gardener has a different idea of the style of herb garden they would like to create. Formal designs generally follow traditional lines and feature clipped evergreen hedges filled in with perennials and annuals. They give clear paths and a strong sense of direction, while informal gardens are often more relaxed with meandering paths that encourage you to stop and take in the colors and fragrances. As with formal designs, paths running through the informal garden are important for picking and maintaining the plants, which grow in large groups and self-seed rather than being restricted to one specific area or bed.



## FORMAL SQUARE DESIGN

Based on the principles of an “open knot” garden, this offers a successful low-maintenance design for a small town garden or a “room” in a larger garden. The path ensures easy access to all four beds.

In the first year, the garden will establish itself. In the second year, trim the hedge to keep the plants at a uniform height. Pinch out growing tips of the bay trees to maintain shape. Lightly cut back sage, thyme, and oregano after flowering, and ensure that they do not smother the bay trees. After winter, check that herbs in the beds have room to spread; remove plants to create space if necessary. Fill any empty spaces. In late summer, cut back herbs after flowering to prevent self-seeding and to stop the stems from becoming woody. By the third year, the box hedge will have started to knit together and the bay trees will have grown up.



## INFORMAL RECTANGULAR DESIGN

This fragrant, relaxed-style garden is planted with mint and lemon verbena, bordered by a silvery hedge of cotton lavender, and has a winding path running through it, planted with a selection of thymes.

In the first year, trim sages, thymes, and oreganos after flowering to maintain their loose shapes, as well as the cotton lavender hedge. Protect tender plants like lemon verbena in winter. In the second year, check that the sorrel, wood sage, and oreganos have not spread too much. Lift and divide if they have (see page 53). Cut back lemon verbena and southernwood and remove growing tips from bay, myrtle, and luma. By the third year, the garden will have filled out and the hedge established. If you wish your garden to keep its shape, cut it back in spring. The thyme plants on the path may also need replacing.



# Choosing a shape

Before you decide upon a shape, consider the space available and whether you want to plant up your whole garden with herbs, or would you like them to occupy a “garden room” within a larger garden, or just a flower bed or corner? Round or oval-shaped gardens are a lovely solution; the curved edge also allows access from all sides. A triangular herb bed is a good solution for the corner of a larger garden. A rosemary hedge along two or three sides protects Mediterranean herbs like oregano and thyme from exposure to cold winds and driving rain, and they will thrive. Clip the hedge to give a more formal appearance.



## OVAL GARDEN

Oval and round gardens are good for making the most of a small space. This design has an S-shaped path edged with golden box, which runs like a golden ribbon through the design. The path creates the illusion of space, and makes picking the culinary and medicinal herbs a pleasure.

As the herb plants mature, a tapestry effect will be produced as the different herbs blend together. To achieve this effect, keep invasive plants like buckler leaf sorrel in check, and trim tall plants so that they do not dominate this small garden. Cut back lavender, sage, and thymes after flowering to maintain their shape, and cut off feverfew flowers to prevent self-seeding. Protect wild rosemary if the weather is cold, and mulch between plants in the fall. By the third year the box hedge should be established and the thyme plants cascading over the edge of the oval.



## TRIANGULAR CORNER GARDEN

Here the border of rosemary plants has only recently been planted and needs time to grow into a hedge. Creeping thymes have been planted in the center of this simple design to create an aromatic carpet. In summer, when the thymes and rosemary are in flower, they will attract butterflies to this aromatic garden. The garden has been mulched with gravel to inhibit weeds and to enable thyme to gain a foothold.

In the first year, only trim the top growth of the young rosemary hedge. In summer, trim the thymes after flowering to encourage new protective growth for the winter. In spring, check to see if any gravel has been washed away, and spread more if necessary. By the third year, the hedge can be properly trimmed and shaped to the required height. Make sure that there is a gap for access to the thyme plants.



# Herbs and planting design

Describing how she first sets out a planting design, the influential plantswoman Beth Chatto says she treats the garden like any other room in the home—large plants are the “furniture,” creeping plants the “carpet,” and decorative plants the “ornaments.” This simple yet effective approach is, in my experience, the key to successful planting and design in the herb garden. When clipped and trained into shape as hedges, plants such as box (*Buxus sempervirens*) provide the furniture for the garden and create the necessary height and structure for the design, while paths of creeping thyme or lawn chamomile make a wonderfully fragrant carpet. For ornament and decoration, groups of annual and perennial herbs will bring the garden alive with their changing colors and textures, coming into flower and dying back as the year progresses.

## Herb ideas

The following herbs can be combined to create the herb garden you want, according to your planting plan (see opposite). Choose herbs you will make use of, as well as those that will work best in your garden.

**HEIGHT AND STRUCTURE** *Angelica archangelica* (angelica); *Angelica sylvestris* ‘Vicar’s Mead’ (angelica Vicar’s Mead); *Buxus sempervirens* (box); *Calomeria amaranthoides* (incense plant); *Chenopodium giganteum* (tree spinach); *Cynara cardunculus* (cardoon); *Eupatorium purpureum* (Joe Pye weed); *Humulus lupulus* (common hops); *Juniperus communis* (juniper); *Laurus nobilis* (bay); *Myrtus communis* (myrtle); *Olea europaea* (olive); *Sambucus niger* (elder); *Ugni molinae* (Chilean guava).

**LEAF TEXTURE** *Anethum graveolens* (dill); *Artemisia abrotanum* (southernwood); *Foeniculum vulgare* (fennel); *Meum athamanticum* (meu); *Perilla frutescens* var. *purpurascens* (purple shiso).

**GROUND COVER** *Centella asiatica* (gotu kola); *Chamaemelum nobile* ‘Treneague’ (lawn chamomile); *Satureja douglasii* (yerba buena); *Sempervivum tectorum* (houseleek); *Thymus* species (thyme).

**DECORATIVE HERBS** *Achillea millefolium* (yarrow); *Agastache foeniculum* (anise hyssop); *Alchemilla mollis* (lady’s mantle); *Allium schoenoprasum* (chives); *Cichorium intybus* (chicory); *Echinacea* species (echinacea); *Hyssopus officinalis* (blue hyssop); *Lythrum salicaria* (purple loosestrife); *Malva sylvestris* (common mallow); *Monarda fistulosa* (wild bergamot); *Oenothera biennis* (evening primrose); *Primula vulgaris* (primrose).



**This magical walled** garden combines a wonderful freedom of planting with a sense of structure. Masses of lady’s mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) overrun the gravel between clipped box “lollipops.”

## Creating a plan

The key to a successful planting is to work with nature. Look carefully at your previous planting and take note of which plants grew well without needing constant attention. The secret is to understand your garden environment (see pages 18–19) and learn to work within your specific site. Once you know where to position herbs in the garden, the creative process of planting design becomes much simpler. When selecting herbs for your planting scheme, consider each plant's characteristics, such as height and structure, leaf texture, and flower color, and which herbs will provide year-round interest. A thoughtful planting plan with a range of heights and shapes will, in my experience,

look most effective (see pages 28–29), as will a design that has been created to evolve over time as the plants mature.

Look to the work of garden designers for inspiration. If you want to inject your herb planting design with color, consider Sandra and Nori Pope's planting combinations with their striking color contrasts. If you favor the wild, naturalistic approach, look to Piet Oudolf's country garden designs, or to Beth Chatto for wonderful gravel-garden plantings. When you have decided on the effect you wish to achieve, and have considered the shape and scale of the site, you are ready to put your planting plan into action.



◀ **After**—this photograph was taken in early summer, three months after planting. It shows how careful preparation of the soil in the previous fall, along with detailed planning, can give a productive culinary herb garden in the first season.

▼ **Before**—this was the space chosen for the herb garden. It had not been used as a garden for a number of years, and the soil was very compacted.



# Herbs in existing borders

Herbs can be successfully planted into existing flower borders. Their subtly colored foliage and flower colors combine well with trees and shrubs. Equally, they look stunning in decorative vegetable gardens planted in formal patterns. In flower borders herbs mix well with wildflowers, especially in gravel gardens where they can self-seed and enjoy well-drained Mediterranean-type growing conditions. If the reason you like an herb is purely because of its color or leaf shape, rather than its culinary or medicinal value, feel free to grow it for its appearance with other plants that you enjoy. Another reason for growing herbs with flowers in the garden is that they are popular with insects and butterflies. Plants such as angelica Vicar's Mead (*Angelica sylvestris* 'Vicar's Mead') and cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus*) are particularly attractive to beneficial insects.

## Herbs with other plants

**HERBS AND VEGETABLES** In an organic garden, herbs make good companion plants for flowers and vegetables. For example, blue borage flowers (*Borago officinalis*) grown alongside climbing beans will attract bees that pollinate the beans, producing large harvests. Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) planted next to rose bushes deter blackspot and help fix nitrogen in the soil. Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) grown between rows of carrots distracts carrot-root fly and flea beetle from brassicas.

**HERBS AND ROSES** Historically, when monks were planting medicinal herb and vegetable gardens, they would plant a rose bush at the edge of the herb bed to symbolize themselves at work. I have seen this use of roses and herbs in a number of historic gardens, notably the famous potager at Barnsley House, in Gloucestershire, Britain, where white standard roses are underplanted with lavender to stunning effect.

**HERBS AND FLOWER COLOR** In a formal garden, flowerbeds filled with black tulips and sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) and edged with clipped evergreen box hedges look striking. I enjoy the skillful use of tall silver-gray cardoons (*Cynara cardunculus*) as architectural plants, giving structure and height in gray and pink color-themed borders. In the flowerbed next to my house, I have mixed ceanothus (*Ceanothus thyrsiflorus*), jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*), and tree peony (*Paeonia delavayi*), and underplanted this with lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*) and lady's mantle (*Alchemilla xanthochlora* syn. *vulgaris*). This combination of herbs and flowers works well, giving color interest through the seasons.



**The swathe of painted sage** (*Salvia viridis* var. *comata*) through this border complements the colors of the other herbs.





**An attractive border** of color and texture can be created with a balance of shrubs and perennials.

## Good combinations

**WHITE HERBS** *Allium ursinum* (wild garlic); *Carum carvi* (caraway); *Chamaemelum nobile* (Roman chamomile); *Meum athamanticum* (meu); *Myrrhis odorata* (myrrh); *Valeriana officinalis* (valerian).

**SILVER-GRAY HERBS** *Artemisia absinthium* (wormwood); *Cynara cardunculus* (cardoon); *Marrubium vulgare* (white horehound); *Nepeta x faassenii* (catmint); *Olea europaea* (olive).

**BLUE HERBS** *Borago officinalis* (borage); *Centaurea cyanus* (bachelor's buttons); *Cichorium intybus* (chicory); *Hyssopus officinalis* (hyssop); *Lavandula x christiana* (lavender Christiana); *Linum perenne* (flax); *Nigella sativa* (black cumin); *Salvia clevelandii* (Jim sage).

**MAUVE/PURPLE HERBS** *Allium schoenoprasum* (chives); *Lavandula stoechas* 'Willow Vale' (lavender Willow Vale); *Mentha spicata* var. *crispa* (curly mint); *Monarda fistulosa* (wild bergamot); *Origanum vulgare* (wild marjoram); *Symphytum x uplandicum* (Russian comfrey); *Thymus pulegioides* (broad-leaved thyme); *Thymus serpyllum* (creeping thyme).

**PINK/RED HERBS** *Angelica sylvestris* 'Vicar's Mead' (angelica Vicar's Mead); *Cedronella canariensis* (Balm of Gilead); *Centella asiatica* (gotu kola); *Pelargonium* 'Attar of Roses' (rose-scented pelargonium); *Sanguisorba minor* (salad burnet); *Teucrium chamaedrys* (true valerian); *Thymus coccineus* (creeping red thyme); *Tropaeolum majus* 'Empress of India' (nasturtium Empress of India).

# Herbs in containers

By growing herbs in containers, you can choose the soil and position to suit the plant. Containers of culinary herbs by the back door or on a windowsill are easy to access and are an effective way to grow herbs if space is limited. Most herbs adapt well to growing in containers. Details of the best conditions for growing individual herb species in pots are provided in my *Top 100 herbs* (see pages 74–215). Tender herbs like lemon grass are best grown in containers; they can be sunk into the flowerbed for the growing season and then lifted in winter and moved under cover for protection against frost, without damaging their roots. The rampant spread of invasive herbs, such as mint and horseradish, can be kept in check when grown in pots too, because their roots are contained and prevented from dominating the herb garden.

## Maintaining herbs in containers

Choose a quality substrate so that the plant will thrive in this restricted environment; this will also help prevent the fertilizer from leaching out. I find that the most reliable all-round substrate is a loam mix. To make your own loam-based potting substrate, mix seven parts loam, three parts fine bark, and two parts coarse sand. Alternatively, buy an organic multipurpose potting substrate from a garden center.

Seaweed and liquid comfrey are ideal fertilizers for feeding container plants (see page 39), or you can make your own fertilizer mix using: 8 oz (225 g) seaweed meal;

4 oz (110 g) bonemeal; 3 oz (85 g) hoof-and-horn, and 2 oz (50 g) ground limestone. This fertilizer mix will make enough for 35 quarts of potting substrate. Use the feed once a week during the growing season.

It is important to judge how often a container plant needs watering—too much or too little can cause stress or long-term damage. Watering is dependent on the size and type of the plant, and the container material. Do not allow container plants to dry out; once the substrate is dry, it is very difficult to get it to take up water again. One of the easiest ways to check is to lift the container, and add water only if it feels light.



◀◀◀ **Creeping pennyroyal** (left) grown on a windowsill is a good herb for repelling ants and treating insect bites.

◀◀ **Common thyme** (center) likes well-drained soil. If the garden soil is heavy clay, a loam-based potting substrate in a container may offer a solution.

◀ **Grow parsley** (right) in terracotta pots for use in cooking.



## Choosing containers

**DRAINAGE** Make sure that your chosen container has adequate drainage holes. Add broken terracotta shards or large stones to the bottom of the pot for extra drainage and to prevent the root ball from sitting in water and rotting.

**SIZE** Choose the container to suit the plant. A tall plant will need a wide-based container to prevent it from becoming top-heavy and blowing over in strong winds. Also, many plants, such as bay and olive trees, like to have their roots confined and thrive when pot-bound, so do not plant them in too large a container.

**MATERIALS** Terracotta pots look wonderful but can harbor disease from previous use. Scrub them out well before planting and, if they need sterilizing, dry them in

an oven at 245°F (120°C) for 30 minutes. To give brand-new terracotta pots an aged look, cover the outside of the pot with live yogurt to encourage moss to grow. Glazed pots are not as porous as plain terracotta and retain water better; but they may be prone to cracking in frosty weather.

Plastic offers the lightest and least expensive of container materials. However, sunlight can make plastic brittle. Woven willow containers look lovely but will only last a couple of seasons because they rot in wet weather. Line woven willow containers with moss before planting up with herbs to hold the substrate in place and retain moisture. Make sure metal containers have adequate drainage holes, and place them out of the midday sun, because the hot metal will heat up the soil and may damage the root ball of the plant.



◀ **Nasturtium** Empress of India (*Tropaeolum majus* 'Empress of India') was a show-stopper in this selection of unique containers from our 2008 Gold Medal display at the Chelsea Flower Show. As an annual, it gives flexibility and allows a change of color emphasis for the following year.



# Feeding the soil

Bulky organic waste products can be added to the soil in winter or spring, or both, to improve the soil structure (see page 20) and increase its supply of food. Organic material is spread over the soil as a mulch or dug into the top 6–8 in (15–20 cm). Spring feeding gives a boost at the start of the growing season, while winter feeding offers a slow, steady release of nutrients before the next year's planting. Recycled organic waste forms the basis of all organic soil improvers. If you have a small yard, it may be difficult to generate enough to make your own compost. Make sure that any compost you buy is approved by an organic body, such as Garden Organic.

## Compost and mulches

Compost is made from recycled garden waste that has been given time to rot down into a friable substance of medium fertility, which feeds the soil when added in spring or fall. Mulches, on the other hand, are made from low-fertility waste, such as leafmold or compost bark, both of which inhibit weeds and prevent the soil from drying out in summer.

**MANURE** This is available from organic or non-intensive farms, and from garden centers. Make sure that the manure is well rotted before use because this stabilizes the nutrients, preventing them from being washed away by rain. To check the quality, smell the farmyard manure. It should have a sweet smell, not a strong and acrid one.

**LEAFMOLD** This is a useful soil improver and mulch. It has a low nutrient content so it suits most herbs. Dug into clay soil, it improves the structure and the airflow; when added to sandy soil, it helps retain moisture. As a mulch, leafmold is effective for suppressing weeds.

**COMPOSTED BARK** This mulch is useful for weed control since it is low in nutrients. Make sure it is well rotted; fresh green bark has a high content of ammonium nitrate and can burn young seedlings and tree trunks.

**COMPOSTED WASTE** This organic compost is made from a mixture of garden waste, woody stems, and household waste such as fruit and vegetable peelings. Once composted, it has medium fertility, ideal for feeding all plants. It is best applied in spring, either as a mulch or dug into the soil.

## Natural compost accelerators

Chamomile, yarrow, and comfrey plants can be added to the compost heap to speed up the decomposition process. The heat they release accelerates decay and kills weed seed. Comfrey leaves rot down quickest and are high in minerals.



**Chamomile plants** are placed on the compost heap, to act as a compost accelerator and kill weed seed.

## Making compost from organic waste



**1 The key to healthy compost** is a good mix of materials. Only using kitchen waste or grass cuttings will create wet slurry. I start my compost off with woody prunings, which are slow to compost and allow air to circulate in the compost bin.

**2 Next add a layer** of organic kitchen waste, 3–4 in (8–10 cm) deep, then straw or cardboard. Repeat layers. If too dry, add grass or kitchen waste. If too wet, add straw or prunings. The compost is ready when dark brown and crumbly. This will take about 16 weeks in summer.

## Making leafmold



**1 In the fall, gather up** fallen leaves from deciduous trees and shrubs in your yard. Do not take leaf material from woodland, which will upset the natural ecosystem. If you have few trees, go to your local garden center for a supply of leaf material.

**2 Place leaves** in an open bin, or lay sheeting over the mound to stop them from blowing away. Leave them to rot down to a mulch. One-year-old leafmold is a good mulch; two-year-old leafmold is an excellent soil improver when dug into the soil in spring or fall.

# Seasonal use of compost

The soil is the engine of the garden, and to maintain healthy plants it needs to be fed with organic compost: ideally, twice a year. In spring, dig in compost with a spade for an instant feed, if you have lifted herbs from the soil and wish to replace them with new ones. Compost again in the fall when the herbs have flowered and died back.

In the fall, a layer of compost on top of the soil will feed it with nutrients and improve its structure over the winter months, in preparation for the next year's planting. I discourage the use of chemical fertilizers because, unlike organic versions, they can upset the microorganisms in the soil which, in turn, will upset the natural ecosystem of the garden. If you do not make your

own organic compost (see pages 36–37) or do not have access to organic farmyard manure, there are now organic fertilizers available from garden centers. "Hoof-and-horn," made from the finely ground and sterilized hooves and horns of cattle, is an organic source of slow-release nitrogen, while seaweed meal adds nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.

## Preparing the ground



**1 Weeding** is an important first step before you start adding compost to the soil. It is important to remove as many weeds as possible, or the rich compost will feed the weeds and encourage their rapid growth. Use a fork to lift them, and carefully pick them out by hand.



**2 Turn over the topsoil** by digging over the ground with a spade to help aerate the soil. Always stand on a wooden board when turning over the soil to spread your body weight evenly and avoid compressing the soil and damaging its structure. Turning the soil also makes it easier to dig at a later date, when planting the garden.

## Fall



**3 Lay on compost** by spreading the compost over the soil with a fork in a thick layer. I recommend feeding the soil with compost in the fall to activate the microorganisms in the soil. The action of the microorganisms in the compost warms up the soil, while rainwater helps release nutrients into the soil.

## Spring



**4 Digging in compost** the following spring will mix in any compost remaining on the soil surface that has not been absorbed or washed away. Established herb plants and newly planted annuals will all benefit from the composted soil. If you have not laid compost on your soil the previous fall, you can still dig in compost in spring to provide an instant feed for the newly planted herbs.



# Organic liquid feed

Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale* or *S. x uplandicum*) is perhaps the best natural fertilizer because it is rich in potassium, calcium, iron, and manganese. The comfrey plant provides an abundant crop of leaves, which are available to harvest from spring through to late summer and can be simply and quickly made into a liquid feed.

The liquid feed made from this herb is ideal for foliar-feeding salad herbs, such as wild arugula and chicory, for root-feeding container plants like box, and as a tonic for restoring mature garden plants such as southernwood or licorice to health. For root feeding, dilute the liquid feed concentrate to 1 fl oz (25 ml) per quart (liter) of rainwater. To use it as a foliar feed,

dilute the concentrate to ½ fl oz (12 ml) per quart (liter) of rainwater. Comfrey leaves can also be placed on the compost heap to speed up decomposition (see page 36), or added directly to a trench when planting potatoes. Always wear gloves when dealing with comfrey because some people are allergic to the hairs on the leaves, which can cause a rash.

## Making liquid comfrey leaf feed



**1 Pick comfrey leaves**, wearing gloves, in the early morning when they are at their freshest. Choose a bucket that will not rust and contaminate the liquid, and that has a tight-fitting lid to contain the strong odor of the comfrey leaves as they start to break down. To make approximately 1 quart (1 liter) of liquid feed concentrate, use a bucket that holds 8 quarts (8 liters). Pack with the leaves, weigh them down with something heavy like a concrete block, and pour 1 pint (600 ml) of rainwater over the leaves. Cover with the lid and place in a warm position but not direct sun. Leave for three to four weeks.



**2 After three weeks**, remove the bucket lid to check the progress of the comfrey liquid feed. The leaves should have started to rot down, producing a murky brown liquid. If you cannot see any brown liquid, or the leaves are still taking up more than half the bucket space, replace the lid and leave to mature for another week.



**3 Strain the liquid** through a piece of cheesecloth or a pair of old pantyhose into a clean bucket or bowl. Discard any leaf material that collects on the strainer. This concentrated comfrey liquid feed will keep for up to six months if stored in a screw-top bottle, out of direct sunlight. Dilute as above to make a root or foliar feed.

# Herb propagation

For me, propagation is the most exciting job on the farm. I never cease to be amazed that from a cutting you can produce a new plant, and there is nothing more satisfying than to see the seedlings emerging in row upon row of trays. From the start, I taught myself how to grow plants without growth-promoting hormones like rooting powder. It is not necessary for herb cuttings and is particularly harmful for women, upsetting their delicate hormonal balance. The first few weeks are critical and will determine both the health of the plant and its resistance to disease in later life.

## When to propagate?

Propagation is not a complicated science. For successful seeds and cuttings, simply watch and imitate the natural cycle. The fruity mellow scent of fall in the air is the signal to sow all fall seeds, such as angelica and foxgloves. Leave them outside in their containers to expose them to winter weather, especially fluctuating temperatures, which will encourage them to germinate. The change in the air temperature is also the signal to cut back hardy perennials to encourage them to put on

new growth, which not only gives protection in winter but also ensures strong new shoots in spring, from which successful softwood cuttings can be taken. In spring, look for the first signs of weeds growing. As soon as weeds appear, you know the soil is warming up and that day length is increasing, so it is time to sow annual herbs in open ground and to take softwood cuttings from established plants.



**Fennel seedlings** need to be sown under protection in the spring, and kept indoors until the threat of frost has passed.

## Greenhouse propagation

Balancing the natural ecosystem in an artificial environment, such as a greenhouse or conservatory, requires constant surveillance because soft, lush seedlings that have no natural protection are easy pickings for pests. Also, the more seedlings you grow in one site, the more food there will be for pests, and they will thrive in the warmth of this sheltered environment. To save having to check under every plant leaf and examine every tray for pests, hang yellow sticky traps throughout the greenhouse as an organic method of pest control. Any pest present will stick to the traps, making it easier to diagnose the problem, be it an infestation of whitefly, scarid fly, or greenfly. If you find signs of pest damage, you will need to introduce a biological control to restore the balance, such as a natural predator that will prey on the pest. For whitefly the best predator is the parasitic wasp, *Encarsia formosa*. Both sticky traps and predators are available from garden centers.

## Propagation tips

Growing herbs from seed and cuttings under protection is very different from planting them out in open ground. In an artificial environment, you can control the soil, water, and temperature, and mimic the plant's preferred germinating conditions.

**LIGHT** Plants need light to grow, but seedlings and cuttings do not like being exposed directly to the hot midday sun, which scorches young leaves. Cover seed trays with lightweight horticultural fleece to shade them.

**TEMPERATURE** Cuttings need warmth to encourage roots to form and grow. Every seed has an optimum temperature for germination. Although most seeds germinate within a fairly wide temperature range, some have limits, so it is worth checking (see pages 74–215).

**WATER** Cuttings need to replace moisture lost to put on top growth and to encourage roots. Seeds need water to penetrate the outer seed coat to begin the germination process.

**AIR** On the occasional warm day in winter and early spring, open your home or greenhouse windows. Good ventilation encourages growth and helps prevent disease. Oxygen is needed for plant respiration and carbon dioxide for photosynthesis.



▲ **Mint plants** are potted up from small pots to a larger one, ready for the growing season.



◀ **Borage seedlings** (*Borago officinalis*), almost ready for potting, emerge through a layer of perlite (see page 46).



# Propagation methods

There are five key techniques used to propagate herbs, and the one you choose depends on the time of year and each plant's growing cycle. For example, sweet cicely (*Myrrhis odorata*) can be propagated by one of three techniques: it can be raised from seed sown in winter; from root cuttings in spring; or by division in fall or spring. I have indicated the most appropriate method for each herb in my Top 100 herbs section (see pages 74–215).



## ◀ From seed

Any herb that produces flowers will produce seed. Seed is the only propagation method for annual herbs (see pages 45–49). Biennials—herbs that survive for two years—are also only propagated from seed. In the first year they produce leaf, and in the second flowers, then seed. For perennial herbs, cuttings are the best method of propagation.



## ▲ From root cuttings

Herbs that spread by creeping roots are propagated from root cuttings (see page 52); the best time to take cuttings is spring or fall. For taproots, a slice of root is taken, for creeping roots a thin piece of root with two growing nodes, and for roots that have both, like mandrake, a piece of root is sliced off with a growing node.



## ▲ From soft- or hardwood cuttings

Cuttings (see page 50) are a successful way to propagate herbs, especially those slow to develop from seed or whose seed is sterile. It works well for herbs that come from warmer climates and do not set seed because the day length is too short, the temperature too cold, or too damp.



## ▲ By root division

This involves digging up the root ball and breaking it up to produce smaller plants (see page 53). It is suitable for hardy herbaceous herbs that can, in time, die off at their central core. By dividing the plant you keep it vigorous and healthy. Like root cuttings, the best time of year to divide the roots is in spring or fall.



## ▲ By layering

With this method (see page 51), one of the oldest forms of propagation, you encourage the plant to form roots while attached to the parent plant. Herbs successfully propagated by layering include sage and rosemary, because they have low-growing branches. Layer in spring or fall when soil is warm.

# Choosing seed and seed containers

Take care when buying herb seed—many producers offer enhanced germination, and have used fertilizers and pesticides to achieve this. For example, “pelleted” seeds have an added outer case of nutrients, and “primed” seeds have been modified to germinate quicker. An established herb garden, offers the best source of seed because you know its origins. First, check that harvested seeds have no signs of pests or diseases. Keep a record of when they were collected because some only remain viable for a year.



▲ **Pot** Sowing directly into pots is ideal for seeds that are slow to germinate. A pot is also suitable if you intend to grow only one type of herb since it occupies far less space than a seed tray. They also offer more space for large seeds. The disadvantage of pots is that you can only grow one species from seed at a time.



▲ **Seed tray** These trays should be 2–3 in (5–7 cm) deep. The disadvantage of seed trays is that you have to “prick out” (see page 48) each seedling and, when doing so, it is very difficult not to damage the fine roots. Seed trays do not dry out as quickly as modules, and they are useful for propagating seedlings whose germination is erratic.



▲ **Ground** Sowing seed in a prepared open site in the garden is ideal for those herb seeds like dill and coriander that dislike being disturbed and need to establish a taproot before they produce a crop. The disadvantage of sowing into open ground is that you have to wait until the soil is warm enough before you can begin.



▲ **Plug or modular tray** These are multicelled trays with 6–200 cells made from plastic, styrofoam, or pressed peat. Plastic modules are perhaps the easiest to use because rooted, seedlings can be slipped out of the container. These trays are useful for plants that dislike having their roots disturbed, but they do dry out quickly.

# Choosing seed-growing substrate

To give plants the best start in life, choose a quality seed-growing substrate. Do not use soil from the garden—this is not sterile and seeds will have to compete with weed seed. Last year's commercial substrate is not an option either because it may harbor pests or disease. Each year, I make my own mix from the following ingredients: one part fine bark, one part perlite (or vermiculite), and two parts coir. Because seeds have their own food supply, I do not add fertilizer—I find it can inhibit seed germination and growth.



▲ **Fine bark** Tree bark is available in many different grades. For seed sowing you will need a fine- or propagating-grade bark. If using your own composted bark, make sure it has rotted down—this usually takes six to eight months. Fresh green bark is harmful to seedlings; it contains ammonium nitrate that can burn them or stunt their growth.



▲ **Perlite** This is a naturally occurring siliceous rock, heated to produce light, sterile granules. Perlite's structure encourages strong root growth. It is also mixed with other substrates to improve drainage and protect young root systems. It has a neutral pH, so it will not upset the acid or alkaline balance of the chosen substrate.



▲ **Vermiculite** This is the mineralogical name for hydrated laminar magnesium-aluminum-iron-silicate. It has properties similar to perlite, but retains more water and less air and can be added to substrates to improve drainage or aeration. It can also be used as a seed covering to keep moisture in but, in my opinion, it is not as good as perlite for this.



▲ **Coir** This is the outside layer of husk that surrounds the shell of a coconut. It improves aeration and water retention in the substrate, and is ideal for encouraging roots to form quickly. It can be difficult to tell if seedlings need watering because the surface of the coir dries out quickly, while farther down the substrate is still wet.

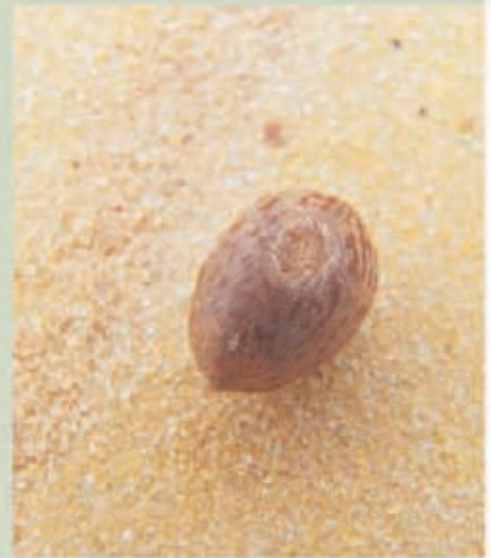


# Germinating seed

For successful germination, try to mimic the natural conditions the seed will experience in the wild. These will vary according to whether it grows in the cold of the mountains (with extreme temperature fluctuations) or the humid climate of the Tropics. Copying these will improve your chances, especially with seeds that are difficult or erratic germinators. In spring, germination is triggered by a temperature increase, but some seeds require extra triggers, such as extreme cold.

## Scarification

Some seeds have hard outer coats that are impervious to water. In the wild, these can be broken by the seed falling from the tree, by a sudden change in temperature, or by being ingested by an animal and passing through its digestive tract. In a controlled situation, you can break down the coating by placing the seeds into freshly boiled water. Allow the seeds to soak until the water cools to room temperature. Other methods of scarification include rubbing the seed coating with fine-grained sandpaper (shown here), or using a knife to nick the outer seed coating, taking care not to damage the “eye” (the little depression where the seed is attached to the ovary). Scarified seeds do not store well and should be planted immediately after treatment. Herbs that require scarifying include: *Ginkgo biloba* (ginkgo); *Laurus nobilis* (bay); *Olea europaea* (olive).



## Stratification

By subjecting seed to sudden changes in temperature from cold to warm or vice versa, stratification breaks down the seed’s protective coating. This mimics winter followed by spring, or summer followed by winter.

**NATURAL STRATIFICATION:** Where winter temperatures drop below 32°F (0°C) for a period of three weeks, sow the seeds into a container and leave outside to experience all weathers. The temperature change will help break down the protective outer coat.

**ARTIFICIAL STRATIFICATION:** Where winter temperatures remain warm, you may need to use an

artificial stratification technique. Mix the seed with some moist vermiculite, sand, or coir (contact with a cold damp substrate will make the seed colder). Place the seed mixture into a plastic bag, label it clearly, and place it in the refrigerator. Keep it at a constant temperature of 32–41°F (0–5°C) for three to four weeks. Turn the bag from time to time to allow air to circulate.

**HERB SEEDS** that need stratifying include:

*Angelica archangelica* (angelica); *Digitalis purpurea* (foxglove); *Meum athamanticum* (meu); *Myrrhis odorata* (myrrh); *Solidago virgaurea* (goldenrod); *Viola odorata* (sweet violet).

# Sowing seed

Before you start sowing, gather up the equipment you will need, including clean pots, trays, or modules, plant labels and a waterproof pen, the seed substrate mix (see page 44), the seeds for sowing, and a paper clip or tape to reseal the seed pack when you have finished. Make sure your hands are clean and that you work on a clean surface so as not to infect the seed or contaminate the substrate. Seal and store any packs containing leftover seed in a dry, cool environment so that they remain viable.

## Fine seed on the surface

Very fine seeds are usually sown on the surface and left uncovered, allowing contact with the maximum light, air, and water. Mix very fine seed with flour or fine sand so that the seed is more visible, then place this mixture into the crease of a folded piece of cardboard. Gently tap to sow the seeds thinly on the surface.

► **Fine seed** *Calomeria amaranthoides* (incense plant); *Viola odorata* (sweet violet); *Viola tricolor* (heart's ease).



## Seeds to cover in perlite

Perlite is a useful cover for small seed. To sow, tip a small amount of seed into the palm of your hand. Allow it to settle in the crease of your palm, then carefully control the flow of the seed onto the surface of the substrate. Cover the seed with a thin layer of perlite to approximately the same depth as the seed.

► **Small seed** *Agastache foeniculum* (anise hyssop); *Allium fistulosum* (Welsh onion); *Foeniculum vulgare* (fennel); *Hyssopus officinalis* (hyssop); *Lavandula angustifolia* (lavender); *Ocimum basilicum* (basil).

Please check the species list on page 49 for more details.



## Seeds to cover in substrate

Some medium-sized seeds benefit from being sown in a dark environment. These are often the seeds of plants that self-seed naturally in open ground; their leaves would have dropped in fall, covering and protecting the seed and blocking out the light. Space seed evenly on the surface, gently press in, and cover with substrate.

► **Medium-sized seed** *Eupatorium purpureum* (Joe Pye weed); *Filipendula ulmaria* (queen-of-the-meadow); *Phytolacca americana* (pokeweed); *Primula vulgaris* (primrose); *Saponaria officinalis* (soapwort). Please check the species list on page 49 for more details.



# Seed-growing techniques

The most important factors for germinating and growing seedlings are water, light, and temperature. Before germination, keep watering to the minimum or the seed will rot, or “damp off,” but, equally important, do not allow the substrate to dry out. Germination takes an average of 10–14 days, but varies from species to species. Once the seedlings emerge, water in the morning so they are not sitting in the cold and wet at night, when temperatures fluctuate. Water the substrate not the seedlings, to avoid fungal disease.

## Growing inside with extra warmth

**PROPAGATOR** This will enable you to control conditions to suit the seed’s needs. Make sure the lid has a vent for regulating humidity.

**WINDOWSILL** Use only east- or west-facing windows to raise seedlings; turn daily to prevent them from bending toward the light.

**CONSERVATORY OR GREENHOUSE** A conservatory is usually hotter. Ensure good ventilation, and protect seedlings in cold weather.



## Growing outside with protection

**COLD FRAME** Use a cold frame structure to propagate seeds that need cold to germinate (see page 46), and to protect tender perennial herbs. Cold frames can be moved from site to site.

**CLOCHE** These are now available in all shapes and sizes. You can create a mini-cloche from a sawed-off plastic bottle, or buy a glass cloche to protect single plants. Alternatively, you can use an A-shaped cloche in the same way as a cold frame.



## Covered with horticultural fleece

Horticultural fleece is available in different weights depending on how much protection you wish to provide. On a cold spring morning on my farm, you will see the young, tender herb plants covered with fleece to protect them during nights when frost is forecast. Always remove the fleece during the day to prevent the plant from becoming too soft, and to check for weeds and slugs. Fleece is also an organic way to deter pests. I use it to cover parsley seedlings as a protective barrier against carrot-root fly attack, and to protect wild arugula crops from flea beetle.





# Pricking out to potting on

Having nurtured your seedlings through germination, the next stage is pricking out and potting on. The seedlings are ready when they have formed their second set of leaves and are well rooted. To check if the roots are well formed, lift up the container and see if they are growing out of the bottom, or gently tap and ease the seedlings out of the pot.

After germination, the roots of the seedlings become more intertwined each day while they grow in their pot, and they will suffer stress and damage when transplanted if they have been left for too long before pricking out. Equally, if you leave seedlings in a module for too long, the root ball will become too tight for the seedling to grow, and plant growth will be weak. Once they are

transplanted, it is very difficult for the new, young roots to emerge from the tight root ball, and this can cause the young plant to die.

Pot seedlings on into a commercial organic potting substrate or make your own substrate by combining one part coir, one part fine composted bark, one part sterilized loam, and one part vermiculite.

## Pricking out seedlings



**1 Seedlings in modules** are ready for potting on when you see their roots emerging from the bottom of the module. Seedlings in pots are ready for potting once they have formed their second set of leaves and have started to grow, making them easier to handle.



**2 Fill a container** with substrate by scooping the chosen substrate into the container so that it is overflowing. Do not pat or tap down the substrate—you are trying to maintain as much air as possible within it.



**3 Remove seedlings** from modules by gently squeezing the base of the module with one hand and pulling the seedling from the module with the other. If you are pricking out seedlings from a seed tray or pot, water the substrate first to make this process easier. Then, using a stick, carefully lever the seedlings out of the substrate. Hold the seedlings by their leaves, not their stems.

I also make my own fertilizer to encourage the newly potted-up seedlings to put on root- and top growth. To make enough fertilizer for four quarts of substrate, mix: 1 oz (25 g) seaweed meal; ½ oz (15 g) bonemeal; ½ oz (15 g) hoof-and-horn and ¼ oz (5g) ground limestone. Alternatively, purchase a good commercial organic fertilizer. Add the fertilizer to your substrate mix at the recommended rate.

You will find that herbs raised in modules will grow twice as fast when potted on as those grown in seed trays or pricked out from pots. The root ball of seedlings grown in modules is hardly disturbed when it is transplanted, so the plant does not go into a state of shock in its new surroundings, and the growth of a module-raised plant remains unchecked. This is unlike

those seedlings raised in trays or pots, which need to regenerate roots before starting to grow on. When potting on, do not compress the substrate because this will remove the air from the soil, making it harder for the root system to develop. Instead, simply tap the pot down on the potting bench or another hard surface when full of substrate, then water in.

Once potted up, the young plants will need to be watered regularly. When you are ready to plant them out in open ground, move them first to a protected site to “harden off” for at least one week, prior to planting. Hardening off is a gentle introduction to outdoor growing conditions and prevents herb plants from becoming stressed by the abrupt change when they have been planted out early in the season.

## Potting on into a container



**4 Pot up the seedlings** by making a hole in the substrate with one finger, then gently positioning the module into it. Do not push the module down into the substrate because this will compact the newly formed roots and reduce the air flow to the root ball, which will inhibit growth.



**5 Position the module** in the newly filled pot of substrate by tapping the container hard on a firm surface. .



**6 Water in well** using a fine rose on a watering can so as not to flatten the young leaves. When ready to plant out, place the young plant in a cold frame or under a cloche to harden off.

# Propagation from cuttings

There is something miraculous about creating a new plant from a cutting. The secret of success with cuttings is to use fresh material, preferably collected before midday, then used as soon as possible to prevent it from drying out before it can be moved to a humid environment, under cover. In a matter of weeks, you will have a replica plant.

Herbs such as mint, oregano, and thyme can all be grown from cuttings. The technique for taking softwood (spring to early summer), semi-hardwood (summer to early fall), and hardwood (fall) cuttings is the same, with the only difference being the time of year that the cutting is taken from the plant. To grow your cuttings on, make up a cutting substrate mixture to fill the modules using one

part coir, one part fine bark, and one part perlite. I also use a small amount of organic fertilizer to encourage root growth without stimulating too much top growth. To make up your own fertilizer (enough for a 4-quart volume of substrate), mix  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz (15 g) seaweed meal,  $\frac{1}{4}$  oz (5 g) bonemeal;  $\frac{1}{8}$  oz (3 g) hoof-and-horn, and  $\frac{1}{8}$  oz (3 g) ground limestone. Use within six weeks.

## Taking softwood cuttings



**1 Selecting cuttings**  
Choose healthy strong stems with fresh growth. Cut them with clean sharp scissors or pruners. To keep the cuttings moist, mist the inside of the bag with water, add the cuttings, then seal to prevent them from drying out. It is best to take cuttings early in the morning before the sun has started to dry them out.



**2 Preparing cuttings**  
Remove the lower leaves from the stem with care, so as not to tear the stem—torn stems attract disease.) Then, using a clean, sharp knife, cut the stem just below a leaf node. The length of the space between nodes can vary from species to species, but try to include the growing tip, plus some leaf plus some stem.



**3 Planting cuttings**  
Gently push the stem end of each cutting into the substrate in a module until only the leaves are visible. Spray-mist the cutting with water to keep it moist.



**4 Growing on cuttings**  
Cover the cuttings. I use a small propagator (shown here). Alternatively, cover the cuttings with a plastic bag, but remember to turn it inside out each day to prevent the bag from becoming too moist. In the morning and again early evening, mist the cuttings with water. They should root within 14–21 days, depending on the time of year—cuttings taken late in the year take longer.



# Propagation by layering

This traditional method encourages the plant to form roots while still attached to the parent plant, and requires a well-established plant with strong growth hanging down to the ground. For this reason, it is a useful method for shrubby herbaceous herbs, where lower branches often root anyway when they come into contact with the ground.

All you are doing by layering the stem is encouraging the plant's natural tendency to propagate itself. The best time for this is in spring or fall, when the soil is warm. Water in well afterward, leaving at least one growing tip above soil level. Throughout the year, check the layered stem and the ground around it. Remove any weeds that may have grown up and water the stem layer because it

is probably sheltered from the rain by the parent plant. After at least one year, check to see if the layered stem has rooted; if not, leave it alone for another year. If it has successfully taken root, cut the stem that joins it to the parent plant. A few weeks later, dig up the rooted layer and replant it into a new, well-prepared site where it will grow into a new plant.

## How to propagate by stem layering



**1 Scrape the stem**  
For large shrubs like sage (shown here), choose a strong, healthy stem and remove all side shoots and leaves from a 12 in (30 cm) section. For smaller herbs with much shorter branches, such as thyme, scrape away only 4–6 in (10–15 cm).



**2 Prepare the ground**  
Dig over the soil well, removing all weeds and stones. For woody herbs like sage, bay, and elder, feed the ground with organic fertilizer to provide the cuttings with extra nutrients so they will take better. For thyme and Vietnamese coriander, good drainage is the most important factor for successful propagation by layering. To improve soil drainage, add fine grit or sharp sand to the prepared site.



**3 Anchor to the ground**  
Remove a slice along the side of the stem that is going to come into contact with the earth. For herbs with fine stems, pin the stem into the soil with a U-shaped piece of wire—this is more than adequate to hold it in place. For thicker herb stems, anchor the stem with metal pegs and bury in a trench for successful propagation.



**4 Cover up the stem layer**  
Spread a layer of soil over the stem, leave the growing tip exposed. Herbs like thyme and Vietnamese coriander will put down roots within one growing season. (If you layer the stem in spring, you will be able to separate it from the parent plant by the fall). However, do not replant the layered stem outdoors in the fall. Instead lift it, pot it up, and place in a cold frame to protect it over the winter months. Plant out the following spring.

# Propagation from root cuttings

The technique you use to propagate an herb plant from a root cutting depends on the size and type of root the plant produces. All root cuttings are taken in the fall or early spring when the maximum energy of the plant is in the roots. Collect and use cuttings on the same day to prevent the root from drying out.

Plants with thick taproots, such as comfrey and horseradish, can be propagated by taking a slice of root from the parent plant, placing it in a pot, and covering it in substrate—the root slice is too big to grow in a module. Herbs with long, thin creeping roots, such as French tarragon, sweet woodruff, and mint, can be propagated by cutting off a section of root about

1 in (2.5 cm) long which has at least two root nodes; this is known as an internodal root cutting (see below). A nodal root cutting is a mixture of the two techniques described above. This technique works well for plants that produce a solid mass of roots, such as mandrake, and involves slicing off a section of root while making sure you take a growing node.

## Sliced root cuttings



**1 Taking a slice of root**  
Wash any excess soil from the root. With a sharp knife, cut the root into approximately 1 in (2.5 cm) thick slices.



**2 Planting**  
Using the cutting substrate mix (see page 50), fill your pot two-thirds full with substrate. Make a small hole in the substrate with your finger, drop the cutting into the hole, and cover with more substrate to just below the rim of the pot. Water in well and label.

## Inter-nodal root cuttings



**1 Cutting a node**  
Having selected your thin roots, wash well to remove excess soil so the growing nodes are visible. Use a sharp knife to divide the cuttings so that each length has two growing nodes. If you look carefully at these sweet woodruff cuttings, you will see that at each root node, small roots have begun to grow.



**2 Planting the cutting**  
Using the cutting substrate (see page 50), half-fill a module tray. Then lay the root cuttings on the surface of the substrate. Cover the cuttings with more substrate to just below the rim. Do not compact the substrate into the modules, which could damage fine roots. Water well.

# Propagation by division

Dividing established herbaceous herbs is a useful way to produce more stock and to keep herb plants healthy. Often, herbaceous herb plants, such as lemon balm, become invasive, and as the plant ages, the central core can die away. Propagation by division prevents these problems from occurring.

Divide herbaceous herb plants in early fall when they start to die back or in early spring, before they put on too much top growth—any later in the season and you could inhibit flowering. When propagating by division, carefully dig up the whole plant plus its root ball, and shake off any excess soil. Divide the root ball in two with your hands or use two garden forks placed back

to back if some extra leverage is required to separate the roots. If you wish to replant one section the plant back in the same site, dig some well-rotted compost into the soil to give the plant a boost when it is put back. Replant the other section of the plant in a suitable spot, or, if you don't have space, offer it to a friend with a garden.

## How to propagate by division



### 1 Dig up roots

The plants to be divided should be dug up in spring or fall. Both wild garlic and French tarragon are best divided in the fall, but for different reasons. The garlic needs time to settle in for winter and allow time for it to mature enough to provide a crop the following spring. The French tarragon can be put, especially in a damp cold climate, will allow you to put some in a cold frame to ensure that it survives the wet and cold of winter. See pages 74–215 for advice on individual plants.



### 2 Divide roots

Either shake the excess soil off the root prior to dividing or hold the root ball under running water to loosen the soil.



### 3 Replant

The divisions should be replanted into a prepared site as soon as possible to prevent them from drying out. Always water the plants in well. Divisions can also be potted up, either as insurance against bad winter weather, or to create a container plant.



# Propagation problems

The main reason seeds and cuttings fail is because of fungal diseases contracted from too much water, a contaminated water supply, or the wrong substrate. Too much water causes seedlings to “damp off”—the term to describe a fungal disease that thrives in cool, wet, poorly ventilated substrates. Even in winter, it is important to maintain good air circulation to prevent this problem. On very cold days, when doors cannot be left open, use an electric fan to circulate the air instead. Hygiene can also cause problems since

## Overcrowded seedlings

It is very easy to sow fine seed too thickly, causing the seedlings to crowd each other out, which in turn inhibits their development into strong, healthy specimens. For sowing techniques, see page 46. If one seedling becomes diseased, the problem can spread very quickly through such close contact with the other seedlings. If you have sown too thickly by mistake, thin the seedlings out as soon as they emerge so you only have two or three seedlings per 1 in (2 cm) module.

### ► Watchpoints

Mix fine seed with flour or sharp sand for a thin sowing. Avoid sowing seedlings too close together to prevent the leaves of individual seedlings from touching one another, which may spread infection (see right).



## Overwatered cuttings

Growing young plants from cuttings brings out the worst in the enthusiastic gardener. If their “offspring” look poorly, the gardener tries to help the ailing cuttings by watering them. Too much water puts young plants under stress since they do not have an established root system to cope. Overwatering also attracts pests, especially sciarid fly, which thrives on wet substrate. The fly lays its eggs in the substrate, the larvae hatch within a week and feed on the plant’s roots; killing off the cuttings.

### ► Watchpoints

The tray or pot feels heavy with water. When you lift a cutting, water seeps out. The cuttings start to die. Clouds of black sciarid fly appear when you knock the tray—a sure sign of very wet substrate.



fungal infections persist in dirty trays and unsterilized substrates between rounds of propagation. It is essential to choose a substrate with the right nutrient content to suit the seedling or cutting, especially when sowing seeds, because a multipurpose potting substrate often has too high a nutrient content for the young plants. This will cause the seedling to grow too quickly, producing thin, weak growth that is vulnerable to fungal disease and prone to attack from pests.

### **Cuttings taken at the wrong time**

As a general rule, it is best to take cuttings when the herb is not in flower so the leaves and stems are in peak condition. When in flower, all of the plant's energy is taken up by flower production. For herbaceous herbs, it is best to take cuttings before flowering; by the fall the herbs will have started to die back. Evergreen herb cuttings are best taken in summer or early fall. Any earlier and the sap will not have risen, so the cuttings are much slower to root.

#### **► Watchpoints**

Cuttings taken at the wrong time to put down roots. Look out for cuttings that are weak and die, or those that root but do not put on new growth.



### **Disease in cuttings**

Cuttings taken from plants that have been attacked by pests are best avoided because the cutting is weak from the outset and will attract disease. Use a clean, sharp knife to take cuttings to avoid diseases like blackleg, which can occur if plant cells in the stem are crushed. Blackleg spreads rapidly, and the only organic solution is to throw away the cuttings and start again. Always wash propagation trays thoroughly after use, especially if previous stock was diseased or attacked by pests.

#### **► Watchpoints**

Look out for the stem of the cutting turning black, or the growing tip of the cutting bending over. Mold growing on the leaves could be the first sign of mildew.



# Seasonal maintenance

I find it useful to keep a record each year of when we take cuttings, when we sow seeds, and what pests have caused problems during the year. The maintenance routine changes very little; in an organic herb garden there are always jobs to be done as you have only natural methods for keeping pests and weeds under control. The secret of a well-managed herb garden is to keep the ecosystem in balance, to stay vigilant, and not be fooled by nature. If spring comes early, for example, be prepared to guard against frost at night—have a roll of horticultural fleece ready to cover up tender plants.

## A year in the herb garden

### Spring

While you prepare the ground for sowing annual herbs in spring, take time to mulch around mature plants to suppress weed growth and to save time spent weeding. Container plants also require attention at this time—they may need repotting, pruning, or moving outdoors. As summer approaches, growing tips need to be pinched out to keep plants bushy, and flowering herbs require regular deadheading to keep them in flower. Tender herbs are ready to plant out.

### Summer

By midsummer, every herb plant in the garden is gearing up for harvest. Now is the time to choose which herbs you are going to let run to seed for propagation, and which ones you wish to keep in cultivation through winter. Summer is also the time to cut back hardy herbs to encourage them to produce extra growth for winter protection and late pickings.

### Fall and winter

As winter approaches, tender plants need protection from frost. Clear away annual herbs. Dig over and mulch the soil to feed and protect it. In winter, plants under protection are prone to disease so provide good ventilation. Take time in winter to select healthy seeds and plan next year's herb garden.

## The maintenance calendar

See the pages that follow for more detailed information on maintenance throughout the year, whether you have a young or mature herb garden; below is a quick reference guide to refer to for your maintenance tasks:

### Early season in the young garden

If the soil has been dug and planted with annuals, your plot will harbor weed seed as well as the young plants. It is essential to be diligent and keep weeds under control or they will take from the soil all the nutrients intended for young plants.

### Early season in the mature garden

It is important to cut plants back to produce new growth. This not only protects the plant, but also creates lots of fresh leaf growth that can be used in cooking, the home, or for medicinal purposes.

### Late season in the young garden

Mulch well between perennial herbs. This not only inhibits weeds, but also protects the roots of young plants through winter.

### Late season in the mature garden

Remember to start feeding the birds so that they stay in the garden for the season. If the weather is excessively wet, cut back hardy herbaceous top growth to prevent it from rotting.





▲ **When frost is forecast**, wrap up tender plants that are too large to be brought indoors, using horticultural fleece.



▲ **In spring**, check plants for damage by pests such as vine weevil. If damage is extensive, introduce a predator to restore the balance.



▲ **Late fall** is the season to cut back herbs like thyme so that they will burst into new growth the following spring.



▲ **Late summer** is the time for trimming box. It will then keep its shape through winter and spring before the summer growing season.

# Early season in the young garden

Spring in a young garden is exciting because you can start to see the results of your propagation and planning work. Having prepared the ground (see page 22), it is very difficult to remain patient and not to rush out and start sowing on the first day of good weather. But you need to wait for the soil to warm through. There is a saying that “if you can sit on the soil without feeling the cold it is time to plant.” Alternatively, wait for weeds to start appearing, a sure sign that the soil is warming up and that it is time to

## Planting out annuals and salad herbs



If you live in an area prone to hard frosts or damp soil, sow seeds under protection; they will need hardening off before they are planted outside. Start by taking them outside during the day for a week; then, if no frost is forecast, start leaving them outside at night. As a general rule, plant seedlings 2 in (5 cm) apart. Water in well and, for the first week, cover them at night with horticultural fleece to encourage them to root.

### Some annual herbs to plant from seed

*Borago officinalis* (borage); *Calendula officinalis* (pot marigold); *Carum carvi* (caraway); *Coriandrum sativum* (coriander/cilantro); *Diploaxis muralis* (wild arugula); *Ocimum basilicum* (sweet basil); *Origanum majorana* (sweet marjoram); *Satureja hortensis* (summer savory).

## Shelter for young plants



When young plants are becoming established, they need protection from birds and high winds. Make a shelter out of twigs to act as a windbreak and a protective cage, which will also water and sunlight to reach the seedlings. If you have trouble with birds eating large plants, string up lines of twine that hum in the wind to scare them off. These are available through organic gardening catalogs.

### Some herbs that need protection from birds

*Anethum graveolens* (dill); *Anthriscus cerefolium* (chervil); *Carum carvi* (caraway); *Chenopodium giganteum* (tree spinach); *Cichorium intybus* (chicory); *Coriandrum sativum* (coriander); *Foeniculum vulgare* (fennel); *Origanum majorana* (sweet marjoram); *Petroselinum crispum* (parsley).



plant. When planting, stand on a plank to spread your weight evenly so as not to compress newly dug soil. Use the side of the hoe to carve a straight shallow drill in the soil where you wish to plant. When sowing dark-colored seed, line the drill with sharp sand prior to sowing to make the seed visible and easier to sow thinly. After sowing, check for signs of pests and disease. Young herbs are tender morsels for slugs, snails, aphids, greenfly, and other pests that frequent the garden in spring.

## Staking young plants



If you want to encourage an herb plant like bay to grow into a standard tree shape, the young plants will need staking and training. This is also the case if you want to make a rosemary hedge or intend to grow herbs on an exposed site, to keep them upright in strong winds. Stake young plants with sticks or bamboo. If possible, support the plant without fastening it to the stake or the stem may bend toward the pole; simply place the stake parallel to the plant stem. On exposed sites, a ring of sticks around the herb will protect it from wind and keep it vertical.

### Herbs to support

*Laurus nobilis* (bay); *Luma chequen* (luma); *Myrtus communis* (myrtle); *Rosmarinus officinalis* (rosemary).

## Weed control



### Weeding techniques

**HOEING**—For best results, keep the hoe sharp, and hoe dry soil on a sunny day, cutting off the weeds where the stem joins the root. (Weed seedlings wilt in sunshine and do not take root again.) Make sure you collect all the weeds when you have finished.

**FLAME GUN, THERMAL WEED KILLER**—A thrilling way to kill perennial weeds is to torch them. This also sterilizes the soil.

**SLASHING AND CUTTING**—A good short-term solution is to cut down the weed plants. Repeat cutting is effective because it weakens and slows down the growth of stubborn weeds.



# Early season in the mature garden

As the soil starts to warm up early in the year in an established herb garden, all your favorite hardy perennials like chives will reappear. This is the time to start weeding. When the ground is clear, apply a layer of mulch (see page 23) to “top up” the nutrient content of the soil after winter, so providing feed for established plants. Also, mulch beds that you intend to leave free of plants, to suppress weeds. In areas where you want to sow annual herbs, dig in well-rotted compost or mature leafmold (see pages 36–37).

## Trimming to shape



In spring, when all chance of hard frosts has passed, trim box plants and rosemary, especially if you are growing either plant as a hedge feature. When growing bay tree standards, cut off the growing tips in spring. This will encourage bay to put out sideshoots and fill out. If you have been picking thyme through the winter for cooking, it is a good idea to give it a light trim to reshape it, and to encourage it to produce new growth in the spring.

### Herbs that need trimming

*Buxus sempervirens* (box); *Eriocephalus africanus* (South African wild rosemary); *Laurus nobilis* (bay); *Luma chequen* (luma); *Myrtus communis* (myrtle); *Rosmarinus officinalis* (rosemary); *Thymus vulgaris* (thyme).

## Removing pests



### Early season pests include:

**CATERPILLARS**—check plants where you have seen butterflies. Pick off eggs and caterpillars by hand. Encourage thrushes and wasps; both are good predators.

**CUTWORM**—these brownish white larvae of a nocturnal moth feed at night on seedlings, roots, and corms. Remove larvae by hand, or turn the soil and expose the cutworm for birds to feed on.

**SLUGS**—remove by hand or, from spring to late summer, introduce a biological control like the parasitic nematode *Heterorhabditis megidis*.

**VINE WEEVIL**—these pests attack species of primula and houseleek (*Sempervivum* species). Remove by hand or use the same biological control as for slugs.

In cold and wet geographical regions, spring rather than fall is the best time to cut back sun-loving, silver-foliage plants like artemisia, because fall pruning will let water penetrate the plant and kill it off. Spring is also the time of year to reorganize the location of plants in an established garden. Dig up plants that have become invasive, and free up space around tall herbaceous herbs like cardoons. Create more space around biennial herbs such as angelica in the year that they are going to flower.

## Pruning



In spring, some herb plants may need pruning to remove dead branches and to cut out dead growth. Spring is the best time of year to prune because you can see what needs doing more clearly when there is little leaf canopy. It is also a good time to prune and reshape Mediterranean herb plants like myrtle and olive, which favor dry conditions. Avoid pruning these in the fall because the wound caused by pruning may not heal before cold and wet winter weather sets in, encouraging infection.

### Herbs to prune in spring

*Aloysia triphylla* (lemon verbena); *Artemisia abrotanum* (southernwood); *Lavandula angustifolia* (lavender); *Olea europaea* (olive); *Rosmarinus officinalis* (rosemary); *Santolina chamaecyparissus* (cotton lavender).

## Feeding



Some herbs are best fed in spring, to set them up for the year. This is particularly the case with salad herbs and fruit-producing herbs, since you will be harvesting them regularly and feeding will produce plenty of lush leaf growth. Take care to get the balance right; overfeeding will lead to weak growth, making plants susceptible to pest damage. Spring feeding is also a good idea for tender herbs that have been lifted in the fall and planted out again in spring, to kick-start spring growth.

### Plants that benefit from spring feeding

*Allium fistulosum* (Welsh onion); *Aloysia triphylla* (lemon verbena); *Buxus sempervirens* (box); *Levisticum officinale* (lovage); *Olea europaea* (olive); *Pelargonium* species (scented pelargoniums).

# Late season in the young garden

By late summer, plants in a young herb garden will have started to meld together to create a harmonious whole. There will be some herbs that have exceeded expectations and thrived in your chosen planting position, while for others growth may have been disappointing. Plants that have grown unfettered can be cut back dramatically, but if you are concerned that your pruning is too drastic, plant some of these vigorous herbs in pots to overwinter in a cold frame as insurance against loss. For the poor performers, lift and

## Mulching



Apply extra mulch to a young garden in the fall to keep weed seeds at bay but also to keep the roots of young plants free from frost damage in their first season. Mulches allow water to permeate the soil more easily and reduce the likelihood of the young plants sitting in water. To prevent the plant stem from rotting, do not lay mulch right up close to the herb. There are many different forms of mulch (see pages 36–37), and one may be better suited to your soil and plants than another.

### Herbs that benefit from late-season mulching

*Aloysia triphylla* (lemon verbena); *Cedronella canariensis* (balm of Gilead); *Ginkgo biloba* (ginkgo); *Humulus lupulus* (common hop); *Juniperus communis* (juniper); *Laurus nobilis* (bay).

## Removing seed heads



Deadheading or removing seed heads can prolong flowering of herbs such as pot marigold and nasturtium up until the first frosts. It is important to remove the flowers of feverfew and borage; if they self-seed, you could have swathes of white and blue flowers the following season, which can be very frustrating when trying to establish a mixed herb garden. Another reason for removing the seed heads, especially from annuals, is to save them for drying and sowing the following season.

### Herbs that become invasive if they self-seed

*Anethum graveolens* (dill); *Angelica archangelica* (angelica); *Digitalis purpurea* (foxglove); *Lysimachia vulgaris* (yellow loosestrife); *Oenothera biennis* (evening primrose); *Portulaca oleracea* (purslane).



check their roots for signs of growth during the season. Pot them and put them in a cold frame for the winter, and move them to a new site the next year. Late season is also the time to protect young herbs, especially trees such as olives and ginkgos, that are about to experience their first winter in the soil. Small trees should be covered with a cloche that is open at both ends for good air circulation. Larger trees may be wrapped in horticultural fleece when frosts are forecast.

## Cutting back



At the end of the season, some young plants need more drastic cutting back than others, either of flowers and flowering stems, flowers and new growth (to prevent flowering stems from falling back on themselves and rotting out the plant center, or all top-growth.

### Young herbs to cut back in late season

Flowers and flowering stems: *Lavandula* species (lavenders); *Salvia* species (sages); *Thymus* species (thymes).

Flowers and new growth: *Scutellaria lateriflora* (skullcap virginia); *Symphytum officinale* (comfrey); *Tanacetum balsamita* (alecost); *Tanacetum cinerariifolium* (pyrethrum).

Top-growth: *Melissa officinalis* (lemon balm); *Origanum vulgare* (oregano).

## Lifting tender plants



As the winter months approach, check the weather forecasts and be ready to lift all tender herbs before the first frost. As soon as the night-time temperature dips below 39°F (4°C), lift the herbs, cut them back, pot up, and water them in. Place in a frostfree environment (without central heating) for winter. They will need little water, but check that the substrate is not shrinking away from the sides of the pot. Replant in the garden the following spring once all threat of frost has passed.

### Some tender herbs to lift

*Aloe vera* (aloe); *Calomeria amaranthoides* (incense plant); *Elettaria cardamomum* (cardamom); *Lavandula stoechas* 'Kew Red' (lavender 'Kew Red'); *Pelargonium* species (scented pelargoniums).

# Late season in the mature garden

The hope is that you will have had a bountiful harvest from your herb garden, and your shelves will be groaning with produce to use in the kitchen during the winter months. Now is the time to put your garden to bed for the winter, so that it will perform as well, if not better, the following year. Dig up the older herbs that are past their best and no longer looking beautiful or producing leaves full of flavor. This is better done now than left to the spring because you can place the old plants on the compost heap, dig over the bare

## Removing debris from plant crowns



In fall, I recommend cutting back and clearing the debris from around herbaceous herbs rather than letting the leaves and stems die back naturally. In cold, damp climates, clearance will prevent the crown from rotting away over winter, and you will have a much healthier plant the following spring.

### Herbs that benefit from crown clearance

*Scutellaria lateriflora* (virginia skullcap); *Tanacetum balsamita* (alecost); *Teucrium scorodonia* (woodsage).

## Cutting back hard



In early fall, if you cut back all the season's growth of herbs like oregano, you will see a compact rosette of new growth appearing, encouraged by the warmth remaining in the soil. This growth will ensure light pickings of fresh leaves for cooking throughout the winter months. Cutting back hard can also prevent the spread of disease such as rust, to which mints are prone, and maintain an herb plant's shape.

### Herbs that benefit from cutting back hard

*Hyssopus officinalis* (hyssop); *Melissa officinalis* (lemon balm); *Mentha* species (mints); *Nepeta cataria* (catnip); *Origanum vulgare* (oregano); *Origanum x onites* (French marjoram); *Persicaria odorata* (Vietnamese coriander); *Teucrium scorodonia* 'Crispum' (curly woodsage).

soil, and add some well-rotted manure. By spring the ground will be ready for planting a young herb in the same place, which will grow well in its first season. At this time of year, choose a few herbs to shelter from the cold weather so that you can continue to have fresh herbs for cooking through the winter; thyme, sage, and rosemary are good candidates. Either cover the plants in the soil with a cloche or pot up some of the plants and bring them into the greenhouse, conservatory, or kitchen.

## Encouraging birds and wildlife



I have been extolling the virtues of keeping your herb garden tidy in order to minimize disease and maintain productivity. That said, you need to create space for both pest and predator hibernate during the winter, encouraging them to stay and thus maintain the ecobalance.

**Bird boxes** made with untreated wood should have small entry holes and be placed so cats and squirrels cannot reach in.

**Stacks of wood or logs** will shelter hedgehogs and beetles.

**Mulches** left undisturbed in a mound during the winter are ideal shelter for frogs, toads, shrews, and spiders.

## Mulching the crown



After mature hardy herbaceous herbs like sweet cicely (shown here) have been cut back in the fall, they will benefit from having the area of soil around the crown mulched with compost, but avoid well-rotted manure because it is too rich in nutrients. This layer of mulch will encourage the mature plant to produce lush new growth the following spring and come back healthy and vigorous.

### Herbs that benefit from mulching

*Levisticum officinale* (lovage); *Myrrhis odorata* (sweet cicely); *Phytolacca americana* (pokeroor); *Scutellaria lateriflora* (virginia skullcap).



# Harvesting techniques

An abundant harvest is the reward for having spent time nurturing your herbs. To enjoy the best flavor and medicinal benefit the plants have to offer, it is important to pick the leaves, flowers, seeds or berries, and roots or bulbs carefully and in the best possible conditions. For annual herbs, harvesting times vary according to the plant part you wish to obtain. For biennial herbs, good leaf harvests are achieved in the first year, while roots should be left alone until the second year to mature. For evergreen herbs, the first season is spent patiently feeding and shaping the plant to make sure it puts on healthy growth.

## When to harvest

Although evergreen leaf trimmings can prove adequate for adding flavor to cooking or making a tisane, larger harvests are only an option in the second and third year. But it is well worth the wait because the leaf flavor of evergreen herbs like bay then remains consistent over the year, so that they can be harvested at any time.

Herbaceous herbs, like French tarragon, can be picked fresh only in their own specific growing season. If they are being harvested for culinary use, however, the harvesting period is actually even narrower because the best leaf texture and flavor is generated by the new growth.

Harvesting the leaves of flowering herbs, such as chives and oregano, should be done before or after flowering. During flowering, the energy of the plant is diverted into producing flowers and the leaves become tougher in texture and have less flavor. By cutting perennial herbs back hard after flowering, and giving the plant a feed, you will encourage a second flush of tender young leaves for harvesting.

If you are harvesting herbs for their medicinal properties, you will want to be able to extract the best quality essential oil the plant leaf or root has to offer—this is best from young leaves, just as they start to mature, or mature roots, while succulent young roots are better for cooking. More detailed information on harvesting is provided on the following pages and in my Top 100 (see pages 74–215).

## Harvesting times

Knowing when to harvest the various parts of your plants ensures that you will be able to use each herb at its best, whether for medicinal or culinary purposes. The following pages give more detail on techniques—see below for a quick reference guide to harvesting times.

**Leaf**—from herbaceous and annual herbs. Pick fresh as soon as the leaf is large enough and continue throughout the growing season. Harvest evergreen leaves all year round.

**Flower**—from early summer and in some cases until the first frosts in the fall. The flower is best picked when the bud is just about to open out fully.

**Seed**—in late summer after the plant has flowered.

**Berry**—in early fall after flowering and the berry is ripe (usually signaled by a change in berry color).

**Root**—in the fall. For culinary use, harvest the root just before the plant's top growth dies back, but for medicinal use wait until the plant has died back, but before it has used up its root store to grow again.

**Bulb**—in late summer. Wait until the plant's top growth has died back in the fall so the bulb has a rich store of nutrients.



▲ **Fennel seeds** (*Foeniculum vulgare*) can be collected from the flowerhead for drying in late summer, after flowering.



▲ **Echinacea flower** (*Echinacea purpurea*) is harvested when the seedheads are fully formed. In fall, mature roots are dug up for medicinal use.



▲ **Pokeroot berries** (*Phytolacca americana*) are toxic and turn deep purple when the seed is ready for harvest, from late summer until late fall.



▲ **Sweet cicely seeds** (*Myrrhis odorata*) are brown and shiny when ripe, and should be harvested in late summer.

# Harvesting leaves

Fresh herb leaves can be picked throughout the growing season for use in cooking. For the best flavor, harvest just before flowering. For soft-leaved herbs like parsley, harvest before flowering but after the plants have been well fed—the leaves respond to feeding, becoming lusher and sweeter. Pick leaves in dry weather, before the heat of the midday sun, or the oils that give flavor will evaporate. All herb leaves can be dried or frozen, but drying is preferable; it intensifies the flavor while freezing diminishes it.

## Gathering leaves

Pick in the morning after dew has evaporated, but before the heat of the day. Choose lush, healthy leaves. Harvest fresh leaves in small quantities to avoid waste, and keep different herb flavors separate so as not to taint them. Evergreen leaves can be harvested all year and are best used fresh.

## Collecting



### 1 Pick healthy leaves

For perennial herbs like thyme and oregano, the leaf flavor is strong, so you will need only a few leaves. It is best not to pick more than a third of the available leaves at any time because perennial herb leaves grow back slowly. When picking annual herbs, especially salad leaves, you can take more leaves because the leaf flavor is milder and they are grown to be cropped regularly. Pick quickly since their soft leaves are more likely to wilt. For all herb leaves, choose the healthiest looking, which will have the most beneficial properties. Try not to bruise them—this will damage their structure and impair flavor.

## Drying



### 2 Spread leaves out

The object of successful drying is to eliminate the leaf's water content and at the same time retain the oil that gives flavor. Dry herb leaves separately from each other; small ones will dry faster, and strongly scented herbs may taint more subtle ones. Spread leaves on cheesecloth stretched over a wooden frame. Place in a dark, warm, dry, well ventilated room. Turn them over several times in the first week because they need air to reach every surface in order to dry.

## Storing



### 3 Store in jars

When the leaves are dry enough to crumble, they are ready to be stored. They will quickly lose their flavor and color if not stored properly. Put them in a dark glass jar with a screw top; label with the herb name and the date. Check the container for the first few days; if moisture forms on the lid, the herbs are not dry. Return them to the drying rack. The shelf life for dried herbs is about a year. They are three to four times more potent in flavor than fresh herbs, so smaller amounts are needed.



# Harvesting flowers

Herb flowers usually have only one flowering season per year, so it is important to get the timing right and harvest them at their best. Whichever flowers you harvest, always pick them just as they break open to maintain the best color, fragrance, and taste. There are a number of ways of preserving them, but the best method for preserving flowers for use in winter is to dry them. Many herb flowers dry well, from lavender to bachelor's buttons, and flowers like chamomile are popular in tisanes (see page 221).

## Gathering flowers

Pick in the morning as soon as the dew has dried. Gently shake the flowerheads to remove any insects. Pick the flower either in bud or just when it is starting to open. Pick in small bunches to enable air to circulate and prevent the flower buds from rotting. Once cut, keep out of direct sunlight.

## Collecting



### 1 Select flower buds

Herb flowers are best harvested just after the flower buds appear but before they open fully. At this stage in their development, they offer their most intense oil concentration and flavor. Younger flowerheads are also more beneficial; once overblown, their qualities are reduced. Flowers will continue to open during the drying process.

## Drying



### 2 Warm and dry

Once cut, keep flowers out of sunlight. This is important to maintain good color, fragrance, and taste. You can dry individual flowers on a cheesecloth frame, or cut whole stems and tie them in bunches. Dry bunches with the flowerheads hanging down in an area where warm, dry air circulates. When dried, the flower should feel stiff and dry.

## Storing



### 3 Airtight jars

Dried single flowers can be stored in dark airtight jars for use in tisanes. Flowers dried in hanging bunches should be picked off their stems and stored in dark airtight jars only if they are going to be used for medicinal or culinary uses. Once exposed to air and light, their properties slowly deteriorate. Or, use dried herb bunches in the home (see page 236).

# Harvesting seeds

It is important to know when seeds are ripe for harvesting. For example, borage seeds turn black when ripe and fall to the ground. Fennel seeds turn light brown and should be harvested just as the seeds become loose and start breaking free of the seedhead. If you are unsure, gently tap the plant. If seed falls off, it is time. Always harvest on a still, sunny day, once any morning dew has dried. Take a paper bag or a seed tray lined with newspaper to the plant to avoid dropping and spreading seed in the garden.

## Gathering seeds

Collect seeds as they start to fall or float away from the seed head. Always use paper, not plastic, bags to collect seeds to avoid a buildup of condensation, which may rot the seed. Use separate bags or trays to collect different seeds and take a plant label with you to identify the seed afterward.

## Collecting



### 1 Harvesting seeds

Angelica seed (shown here) is ripe for harvest when it falls into the hand with a gentle tap of the seed head. Use a paper bag to gather a small number of seeds, or line a cardboard box with newspaper, cut the head from the plant, and put it into the box.

## Drying



### 2 Allow to dry out

Clean the seed by removing it from the stems and stalks. Small seeds require a lot of cleaning while others are easy to extract from the dry seed pods simply by shaking them vigorously. Once extracted, spread seed thinly on a piece of gauze or paper towel. Place in a dry, airy room and leave for a few days to dry out.

## Storing



### 3 Ready for sowing

Check the quality of seeds before storing, and discard any that are damaged or half-eaten. Store them in a dark glass jar, cardboard box, or paper envelope, clearly labeled. Write the month and year that the seeds were collected, so you can check that the seed is still viable when you come to sow it.

# Harvesting berries

When berries start to form, fall is well on the way. Seeds encased in berries are best collected fresh. Drier, pithier berries can be left on the bush to shrivel slightly, making it easier to extract the seed, but there is a risk that they may be eaten by wildlife. Another proven method is to place the berries in a bowl of water for several days. Use a pestle and mortar to mash them to a pulp and return to clean water. The pulp and dead seed rise to the surface, while viable, heavy seeds settle at the bottom.

## Gathering berries

Pick fresh berries when ripe and soft. Pick dry berries just as they start to shrivel. Berry seeds from either fresh or dry berries are best sown as soon as they are extracted rather than dried and sown the following season. Wear protective gloves when picking toxic berries like pokeroot.

## Wet berries



### 1 Separating seed from pulp

There are several methods of removing the pulp from fresh berries. You can place the berries in a strainer under running water and rub off the pulp. Alternatively, wrap the berries in a piece of cheesecloth, hold the cloth under running water and, squeeze the berries. Wring out the cloth, then open it and the seeds will have separated from the pulp. For toxic berries like pokeroot (shown here) that have a dark juice that can stain the hands, wear gloves when extracting the seed.



### 2 Extracting the seed

Having exposed the seed, you will need to lift it away from the pulp and place it on a clean paper towel. For best results, sow the moist seed immediately in substrate, and winter in a cold frame. If you are not ready to sow the seed immediately, keep the seeds damp (but not wet) by storing them in a refrigerator, buried in a tray of vermiculite (see page 44) until the next spring.

## Dry berries



### Harvesting dry berries

These myrtle berries were left on the bush over winter before harvesting. To extract the seed, open the berry with your fingertips rather than a knife so as not to damage it. Gently rub between your thumb and forefinger and the seeds will fall out. For successful germination, sow immediately, or keep for one month, stored damp in the refrigerator in a tray of vermiculite (see page 44).



# Harvesting roots

When harvesting herb roots, it is best to dig them up at the end of the growing season, when the plant's top-growth is starting to die back and the maximum amount of nutrition has been stored in the root system. Obviously, it is best not to wait for the top-growth to die back completely, or you may not be able to identify or locate your plant in the garden. In my Top 100, the herbs whose roots I use most are echinacea and Joe Pye weed for medicinal purposes, and licorice and horseradish for cooking.

## Gathering roots

Dig up roots in the fall before the plant's top-growth has died back fully. Wash roots well; do not soak or the flavor will leach out, and they tend to absorb water and rot. If harvesting several different roots at the same time, label them and keep them separate so as not to impair their individual flavor.

## Collecting



### 1 Harvesting

The first light fall frost is the signal for plants to start building up energy reserves in their root system to help them survive the long winter months. It is also the time to harvest roots. Dig early in the morning or last thing at night because at these times the plant's energy remains in the root system; on warm days it rises up to the top-growth. Take care not to bruise the roots when you are lifting them.

## Washing



### 2 Clean the roots

Rinse the roots under cold running water to wash off soil and dirt before you preserve them. If necessary, use a soft vegetable brush to gently clean off stubborn dirt without damaging them. If roots are caked in mud, perform the first wash outdoors with the garden hose so you do not block up the kitchen sink with soil.

## Grating



### 3 Use or store

Horseradish is my favorite culinary root (see page 90). To use fresh, wash the root then peel off the tough outer layers, and grate the flesh. To prepare the root for drying, peel it and then slice into sections. Arrange the slices on a cheesecloth frame until dry. Store the dried root slices in a clearly labeled dark glass jar.

# Harvesting bulbs

The only herb bulb that I include in this book is garlic (see page 81). The most reliable indicator for harvesting is when the first leaves start to yellow. Sometimes garlic puts out a false seed stalk topped by small bulbils; these are edible and taste just like garlic, and are ready for harvest earlier than the bulb. Some people suggest that the true garlic bulbs will be larger if these seed stalks are removed. To do this, wait until the seedheads form a coil, and then cut them off as close to the ground as possible.

## Gathering bulbs

The garlic you buy in the stores is not a named species. However, when it is planted, it will produce a small crop. For a more reliable crop, buy seed garlic bulbs from a reputable organic source that have been acclimatized to the growing conditions of your area.

## Gathering



### 1 Harvesting

The best time to harvest garlic bulbs is midsummer because the top-growth starts to die back and the soil is dry so the bulbs come away clean. Lift the garlic bulbs carefully—damaged bulbs can be stored for only short periods of time before they become diseased. Do not delay the harvest for the following reasons: it makes garlic bulbs harder to clean because the outer leaves start to decay in wet soil; the skins stain as the bulbs mature; and late-harvested garlic does not store as well and may rot.

## Drying



### 2 Leave to air

This stage is critical. In warm, dry climates, garlic can be dried outside. In unreliable or damp climates, it is best to dry it under shelter. Make sure that there is good air circulation and that the bulbs are out of direct sunlight. Depending on conditions, drying will take 14–25 days, after which roots can be trimmed back and the top-growth cut off just above where the bulb forms. If braiding bulbs together, leave a few strands of dried leaves (as shown here).

## Storing



### 3 Cool and dry

A garlic bulb is ready to store when the skin feels papery and rustles when handled. Either braid the dried garlic into ropes, or hang individual bulbs in net sacks to store. Place in an area with good ventilation with a temperature that is above freezing but no higher than 39°F (4°C); otherwise, the garlic cloves will sprout green shoots. If the air circulation is poor or the air humid, the garlic bulbs may start to turn moldy and rot.







# TOP 100 HERBS

# Reasons for choice

Over the past decade, as we have become more familiar with the negative effects of processed foods and prescription medicines, herbs as both healing foods and natural remedies have increased in significance as the key to good health. When I first started growing herbs organically more than twenty years ago I was thought eccentric, but now these ideas have been integrated into the mainstream with more and more people becoming aware of the health benefits that come with choosing foods that are grown free from pesticides and other harmful chemicals.

## Organic and natural

Choosing my Top 100 herbs for this book was difficult because I have a passion for all these useful plants, including those from farflung outposts of the world. There are so many dimensions to herbs: not only are they used in the kitchen or medicinally, but they also work as companion plants in the organic garden, helping other plants grow successfully—or they can form the basis of natural beauty products and household cleaners to help create a toxic-free home. Once grown successfully, the herbs in this section can be pressed into service in the many culinary, medicinal, and household recipes found later in this book.



**Start by growing** just a few herbs for yourself, and discover a world of medicinal and culinary uses for them.

## Everyday and exotic

One of the main criteria for the herbs that feature here was that they had to be grown on the farm, although I have included a tropical plant, the curry tree (*Murraya koenigii*), because I have managed to raise a cherished specimen in a warm greenhouse. I have tried to stick to everyday species, such as sage, thyme, mint, and garlic, that have a role in the kitchen or an indispensable use as an herbal remedy. I describe how to grow each one using my tried-and-tested organic methods. I have also included herbs like shiso (*Perilla* species), which are common in the East but need their profile raised in the West. I especially like the purple variety (*Perilla frutescens* var. *purpurascens*), which is not only wonderful in cooking but looks stunning in the garden.

I have also included herbs that can be used in home remedies. For example, I have chosen *Echinacea* species for their immune-boosting properties, and lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) for its powers of healing and preventing cold sores. However, although I have described medicinal uses for more serious complaints, I would always consult a fully trained herbalist or a doctor before using herbs medicinally, especially when taking them internally (see page 232).

Finally, I have chosen some herbs for their perfume, such as lemon verbena (*Aloysia triphylla*) with its refreshing lemon fragrance, and *Pelargonium* 'Attar of Roses' with its sweet rose perfume. Once you start growing and using herbs, I defy you not to become hooked.



◀◀ **Golden thyme** (*Thymus pulegioides* 'Aureus'). Medicinal and culinary herb, excellent with roasted vegetables.



◀ **Lettuce leaf basil** (*Ocimum basilicum* 'Napolitano'). Wonderful for pesto sauce or for tearing over a tomato salad.



◀◀ **Pink rosemary** (*Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Roseus'). Great for barbecues, rinsing dark hair, or settling the stomach.



◀ **Angelica** (*Angelica archangelica*). This herb is a magnificent structural plant for the large herb garden.



◀◀ **Sweet woodruff** (*Galium odoratum*). A lovely little traditional herb that is very useful in the home.



◀ **Fringed lavender** (*Lavandula dentata*). A highly aromatic lavender, lovely grown in containers.



*Achillea***Yarrow** ASTERACEAE

This invasive herb has naturalized all over the world: it can be found in wasteland, fields, and pastures. Although gardeners who prefer an immaculate lawn consider it a weed, I find it useful in the organic garden. It makes a good compost accelerator (see page 37) and copper fertilizer. Historically, the plant name is taken from Greek mythology, where the great hero, Achilles, used yarrow leaves to heal his wounded warriors. Today it is still sought after by those undertaking country pursuits, as a useful first aid remedy to staunch blood flow.

**How to grow**

| Herb            | Soil      | Propagation |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------|
| <i>Achillea</i> | Sand/loam | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** In the fall, sow seeds in a container and winter in a cold frame. Germination is erratic. In spring, plant young plants 8–12 in (20–30 cm) apart. Since yarrow can be invasive, I do not advise sowing seeds directly into the ground. To control its spread, divide mature plants in spring or early fall.

**SITE** Once established, yarrow will survive in most soils. It is drought-tolerant.

**MAINTENANCE** This plant is prone to self-seeding. Cut back after flowering to prevent it from setting seed.

**HARVESTING** Cut the leaves and flowerheads for drying when it comes into flower, or to use fresh.

**How to use**

Yarrow is known as a “plant doctor,” and when it is planted near unhealthy plants, secretions from its roots actively help the ailing plant by triggering its disease resistance. Yarrow leaves can be infused to make a copper fertilizer to prevent fungi and cure downy mildew, and a few leaves added to the compost heap will speed up decomposition. Before using leaves for medicinal or culinary purposes, wash them well, then pat dry with paper towel. Add young leaves to salads. Yarrow is well known for staunching the flow of blood. Simply crush the leaves to release their tannins; then apply to the wound to stop the bleeding. An infusion made from the flowers is a good remedy for fever. The flowers can also be used in dried-flower arrangements.



▲ ***Achillea ageratum***  
ENGLISH MACE

Hardy perennial. Height 12–18 in (30–45 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). The aromatic leaves are finely serrated, narrow, oval, and bright green. Clusters of small white flowers with cream centers appear in summer.

▼ ***Achillea millefolium***

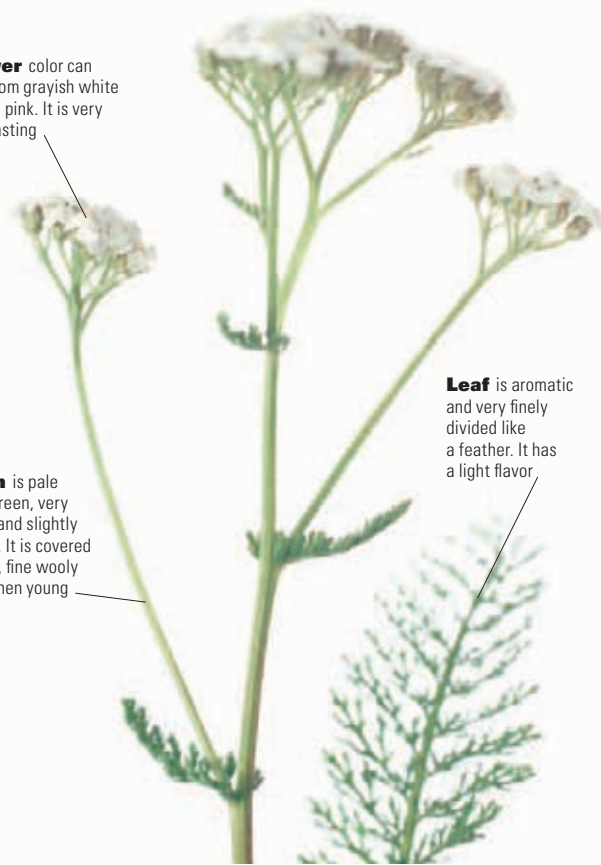
YARROW, WOUNDWORT, MILFOIL

Hardy perennial. Height 12–36 in (30–90 cm) and spread 24 in (60 cm). Small white-pink flowers grouped in flat clusters in summer until fall.

**Flower** color can vary from grayish white to pale pink. It is very long-lasting

**Stem** is pale gray-green, very tough and slightly ridged. It is covered in soft, fine wooly hair when young

**Leaf** is aromatic and very finely divided like a feather. It has a light flavor



Agastache

# Anise hyssop

LAMIACEAE

Renowned for its beautiful flower spikes that attract butterflies, and stunning in a flower border, this North American native has been introduced relatively recently to European herb gardens. Its medicinal healing properties were well known to many native North American tribes. In the kitchen, the young leaves and flowers of this herb offer a mild anise, minty flavor and taste good with fish and chicken dishes. This plant should not be confused with the Mediterranean *Hyssopus officinalis* (see page 129), which also goes under the common name “hyssop.”

## How to grow

| Herb      | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------|------|-------------|
| Agastache | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination takes seven to ten days. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground (see page 47), when the air temperature at night does not fall below 50°F (10°C); germination takes two to three weeks. The plant will flower in the first year. Softwood cuttings can be taken in early summer. When the cuttings have rooted, pot them and place in a cold frame or cold greenhouse for the winter.

**SITE** Plant in a warm, sunny site in any well-drained soil. Anise hyssop can withstand dry conditions, although it is less tolerant of clay soil—where it should be grown as an annual so its roots do not rot. When grown in a container, make sure that the pot size will accommodate the mature plant. Use a standard loam-based substrate with grit added for drainage.

**MAINTENANCE** Once established, this plant needs little maintenance. In the spring of the third season, it is advisable to dig it up and divide it (see page 53) to maintain its health and shape. Feed with a small amount of organic fertilizer such as comfrey or seaweed before replanting.

**HARVESTING** Pick the leaves to use fresh in cooking or to conserve in oil or vinegar (see pages 222–223) before the plant flowers in summer. Pick the flower spikes as they open. Remove the flowerets before use.

## How to use

The plant is used to treat coughs and wheezing. The fresh leaves and edible flowers can be used in leaf and fruit salads, or to make a refreshing infusion.

▼ **Agastache foeniculum (Pursh) Kuntze**

ANISE HYSSOP, GIANT HYSSOP, BLUE GIANT HYSSOP

Hardy herbaceous perennial, grown as an annual in cool or damp climates. Height 28 in (70 cm), spread 12 in (30 cm). Erect long spikes of violet-blue flowers appear in summer. The leaves are oval, toothed, and mid-green with a mild anise, minty flavor.



*Alchemilla***Lady's mantle** ROSACEAE

This is one of the most attractive herbs in the garden and I love to see the dewdrops form on the pale green lacy leaves. Native to Europe and Britain, it has special importance for women, and its attributes are said to include preserving a woman's youth and protecting her from dark forces. It was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and named "Our Lady's mantle" because the leaf shape was thought to resemble Our Lady's cloak. This versatile plant is used to treat hormonal problems in people and animals, and produces a vibrant green dye for wool.

**CAUTION** Do not use in pregnancy and seek professional advice on treating menstrual problems.

**How to grow**

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Alchemilla</i> | Loam | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** Self-seeds easily, or can be sown in pots in a cold frame. Germination takes four to six weeks, but this method is not always successful. Alternatively, sow into prepared ground in early spring. Germination takes six to eight weeks, but again this can be erratic. Thin the seedlings to 12 in (30 cm) apart. Established plants can be divided in spring or fall (see page 53).

**SITE** Lady's mantle will grow in sun or partial shade in all but excessively wet soils.

**MAINTENANCE** This plant is prone to self-seeding, which can cause it to spread prolifically. To prevent seed dispersal, cut off the flowerheads as soon as they die back. In the fall, cut out old growth. In spring, clear up around established plants. In containers, use a soil-based substrate and site in partial shade. Repot each fall. Containers can be wintered outside, but avoid waterlogging or the roots will rot.

**HARVESTING** From spring until early summer, cut very young leaves to use fresh in cooking and mature leaves for use in herbal medicine. The roots can also be used in herbal medicine and should be dug up in the second year. To make the plant dye, harvest mature leaves before flowering.

**How to use**

An infusion of leaves helps alleviate menopausal discomfort and can be used to treat yeast and children's diarrhea. Young leaves have a mild, dry, bitter taste and can be added to salads.

▼ *Alchemilla xanthochlora* syn. *A. vulgaris*  
LADY'S MANTLE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 18 in (45 cm). Spread 20 in (50 cm). This species is very similar to *A. mollis*, but is thought to have more potent medicinal healing properties.



**Flowers** are greenish yellow and appear in clusters in the summer

**Leaf** is round, pale green, and slightly scalloped at the edges

**Mature leaves** are used to produce a green wool dye



*Allium*

# Onion family ALLIACEAE

This popular and important medicinal herb family is grown throughout the world. Alliums have marvelous health-giving properties, and people believed that the stronger the smell, the more effective the healing powers of the plants. In the Middle Ages, people hung bunches of onions outside their doors to absorb infections, the plague, and deter pests. The juice was used as a strong disinfectant and to heal gunshot wounds. Alliums make good companions in the organic garden; they help prevent leaf curl in trees, especially peaches; and planted next to roses, they ward off black spot.

## How to grow

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation   |
|---------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Allium</i> | Loam | Seed/division |

**PROPAGATION** In early spring sow seeds under cover at 68°F (20°C); germination takes 10–20 days. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground, when the air temperature at night stays above 45°F (7°C); germination then takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 9 in (25 cm) apart and divide established clumps every three years in spring.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained fertile soil. Keep well watered throughout the growing season. In the fall, mulch with well-rotted manure.

**MAINTENANCE** Onions are prone to disease. Keep the soil fertile and take care not to damage the roots or leaves when clearing around the plants in spring since the scent will attract the onion fly. Also, when thinning seedlings, remove all wilted ones and any seedlings not required. Take care not to damage the bulbs when hoeing or digging the site, or neck or bulb rot may occur.

**HARVESTING** Dig up bulbs from early summer until early fall. Cut from late spring until early fall. Leaves do not dry well, but can be frozen.

## How to use

The fresh onion juice is antibiotic, diuretic, expectorant, and antispasmodic, and useful in the treatment of coughs, colds, bronchitis, and gastroenteritis. Eating onion, especially garlic, helps lower blood pressure. Use bulbs raw in salads or add to pasta dishes, stews, and casseroles. Use fresh leaves in salads.



### ◀ *Allium cepa* Proliferum Group

TREE ONION, EGYPTIAN ONION,  
LAZY MAN'S ONION

Hardy perennial. Height up to 5 ft (1.5 m) and spread 24 in (60 cm). Small flowers appear in the second summer, followed by edible bulbs at the top of the stem. In fall or spring, propagate from the small stem bulbs.

**Flowers** are creamy-white, globe-shaped, and edible

**Stem** is long, hollow, and cylindrical and can easily bend in high winds or dry conditions

### ▶ *Allium fistulosum*

WELSH ONION, JAPANESE LEEK

Hardy perennial evergreen. Height and spread 20 in (50 cm). Large creamy-white, globe-shaped flowers appear early in the second summer. The leaves can be cut into rings and used in salads. The name Welsh comes from "walsch" meaning "foreign."



*Allium*

# Chive family

ALLIACEAE

This herb is the only member of the onion family growing wild in Asia, Europe, Australia, and North America. Records of its medicinal use date back to 3000 BC, and historically it was used as an antidote to poison and to staunch the flow of blood. I find chives indispensable in the kitchen: the leaves add a mild onion flavor to salads, and I like to mix them with sour cream to spice up plain baked potatoes. There is an old saying “chives next to roses creates posies” because the herb is believed to inhibit black spot. A decoction made from the leaves is also thought to prevent scab infection in animals.

## How to grow

| Herbs         | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Allium</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** See page 81 for details.

**SITE** Plant in rich, moist soil in a sunny position. Keep well watered throughout the growing season. In the fall, mulch with well-rotted manure. Both chives and garlic chives grow well in containers. Use a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** To encourage new, lush growth, cut back after flowering and feed with comfrey liquid feed (see page 39). Chives can suffer from a rust virus. If it occurs, cut back diseased growth and burn it. Alternatively, if your plant is well away from buildings or fences, cover the plant with straw and set it alight; this will burn the top growth and sterilize the soil. The plant should not be composted because the virus will live on in the compost and transfer to the ground. In the fall, on cool, wet days, downy mildew can be a problem. If this is the case, cut back all the remaining growth, dig the plant up, divide it, and replant in a new, prepared site.

**HARVESTING** Cut fresh leaves during the growing season. Use fresh, or preserve in herb butter (see pages 224–225). Use fresh flowers in early summer. Divide the flowerhead into individual bulbils.

## How to use

An excellent culinary herb. The leaves stimulate the appetite and aid digestion. They are also mildly antiseptic.



▲ *Allium ursinum*

WILD GARLIC, RAMSONS

Hardy perennial. Height up to 18 in (45 cm) and spread 24 in (60 cm). Clusters of star-shaped flowers appear in late spring. The mid-green leaves are elliptical. Plant in a moist, fertile soil in semi-shade. Sow the seeds and divide the rhizome in the fall. Both flowers and leaves are edible but eat the leaves before the plant flowers. The leaves may also be boiled, and the resulting liquid used as a disinfectant wipe.



# ◀ *Allium tuberosum*

GARLIC CHIVES, CHINESE CHIVES

Hardy perennial. Height and spread 12 in (30 cm). Clusters of star-shaped white flowers appear in summer. The mid-green leaves are flat, solid, thin, and lance-shaped, and have a mild, sweet, garlic flavor.

**Flowers** are pink or purple and globe-shaped. Edible, they have a mild onion flavor, which is great in salads

**Stem** flavor is inferior to that of the leaf

**Leaf** is hollow and cylindrical. It can be cut into rings with scissors and used in salads

# ▶ *Allium schoenoprasum*

CHIVES

Hardy perennial. Height and spread 12 in (30 cm). The globe-shaped purple flowers are composed of individual bulbils and flower all summer. Leaves are green, cylindrical, and hollow, and have a mild aroma and flavor similar to onion.





*Aloe*

# Aloe

ALOEACEAE

This tropical plant is an indispensable part of my natural first-aid kit, since it produces a soothing gel for treating burns. I always keep a pot growing on my kitchen windowsill so I can act quickly if I burn myself when cooking—I am notoriously clumsy. It has been identified in wall paintings of the ancient Egyptians, and it is said that Cleopatra was the first to use it as a beauty treatment. As a child, I remember having “bitter aloes” put on my fingers to stop me from sucking them—it didn’t work. Do not take fresh aloe internally without seeking professional advice.

**CAUTION** The leaves are a potent laxative, and should not be taken by pregnant women or young children.

## How to grow

| Herb        | Soil | Propagation       |
|-------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Aloe</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds on the soil surface, under protection at 70°F (21°C). Germination is erratic, taking anything from four months to up to two years. It is easier to propagate by division; simply remove the offshoots that form at the base of a mature plant. Replant the offshoots in a coarse loam substrate a day later to give them time to dry out slightly.

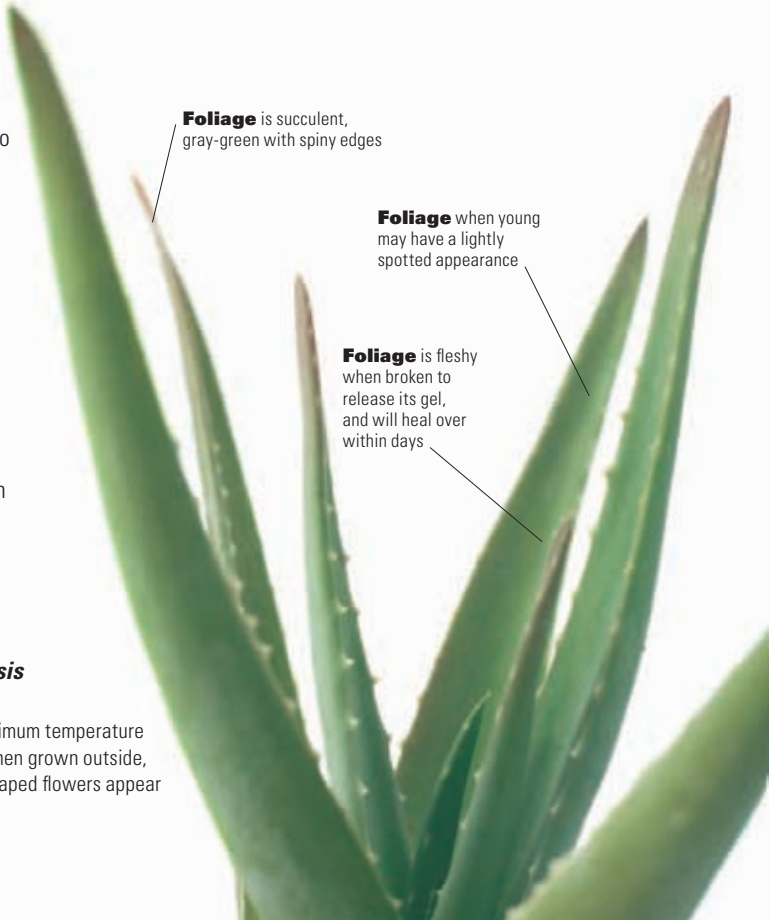
**SITE** In tropical or subtropical climates only, plant outside in full to partial shade in a free-draining soil. In cooler climates, grow it in a container as a house plant. Use a soil-based substrate with extra grit. Although the foliage looks like a succulent, it is more closely related to the lily family and needs water in the growing season.

**MAINTENANCE** If grown as a potted plant, feed monthly throughout the growing season with a liquid fertilizer like liquid seaweed. In winter, keep watering to a minimum, but do not allow the substrate to dry out.

**HARVESTING** Cut fresh leaves throughout the growing season and store in an airtight container in a refrigerator. Plants over two years old have stronger medicinal properties.

## How to use

Break the leaf to extract the soothing gel. Apply the gel to wounds and minor burns. It will form a protective seal over the wound and help the skin to regenerate (see page 238). It can also be used to treat eczema and fungal infections like ringworm and yeast. Used internally, under professional medical supervision, it can soothe peptic ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome.



**Foliage** is succulent, gray-green with spiny edges

**Foliage** when young may have a lightly spotted appearance

**Foliage** is fleshy when broken to release its gel, and will heal over within days

► ***Aloe vera* syn. *A. barbadensis***  
ALOE  
Half-hardy perennial; grows at a minimum temperature of 50°F (10°C). Height and spread, when grown outside, 2 ft (60 cm). Yellow or orange bell-shaped flowers appear on mature plants only.

*Aloysia***Lemon verbena** VERBENACEAE

The uplifting lemon scent of this South American herb can transport you to another world. It was imported into Europe in the 18th century by the Spaniards, and was used to make perfume until cheaper essential oils like lemon grass were substituted. The leaves were also used to perfume and sweeten the water in the fingerbowls offered at banquets. Medicinally, a tea made from three to five leaves of lemon verbena will aid sleep if it is drunk at bedtime; the herb also helps digestion, and is a mild sedative and calmative.

**How to grow**

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation       |
|----------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Aloysia</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** In spring, sow seeds under protection at 60°F (15°C). Germination takes 10–20 days. When seedlings are large enough to handle, prick out into 3½ in (9 cm) pots, using a soil-based substrate with extra grit. Continue to grow in pots, under cover, for a minimum of two years before planting out. I do not advise sowing seed directly into the soil. In early summer, take softwood cuttings from new growth (see page 50).

**SITE** This herb only tolerates outdoor temperatures above 40°F (4°C); below this, protection is needed. Plant in a light, free-draining soil in a warm sunny site (against a warm sunny wall is perfect). It grows well in containers using a soil-based substrate with extra grit. Place the container in a warm, light, airy spot, and water well during the growing season.

**MAINTENANCE** In spring, trim back stems to a point where new growth is developing. (Some years, new growth does not appear until late spring or early summer.) In late summer after harvesting the leaves, lightly prune the plant to remove dead flowerheads and to reshape it.

**HARVESTING** The best time to pick leaves is when the plant goes into flower. Dry the fresh leaves (see page 68) and store them in a dark glass jar. They will keep their scent for at least three years. Harvest fresh flowers and use them as required.

**How to use**

Add leaves to flavor vinegars (see pages 222–223), fruit desserts, gelatin, and cakes. Regular, long-term medicinal use of the herb may cause indigestion or upset stomach.

► ***Aloysia triphylla***

LEMON VERBENA, LIPPIA, VERVAIN

Half-hardy, deciduous shrub. Height to 10 ft (3 m), spread to 8 ft (2.5 m) in warm climates. The flowers have a light lemon flavor; the leaves have a stronger fragrance and taste.

**Flowers** are white with a hint of lilac and slightly lemon-scented

**Stem** is pale beige in color and ridged

**Leaves** are very fragrant, lance-shaped, rough to the touch, and arranged in groups of three around the stem



*Angelica***Angelica** APIACEAE

A native of continental Europe, this herb can be found along river banks and in other damp sites. Take care not to confuse it with poisonous hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), which has white flowers and purple spots on the stem, and leaves that produce a foul smell when crushed. The origin of the species name, *Angelica archangelica*, derives from the story of a monk who, when praying for a cure to the plague, was visited by St. Michael the Archangel, and shown this herb. Angelica has antibacterial and antifungal properties, and is also one of the flavorings in alcoholic drinks such as gin.

**CAUTION** All angelica species may cause skin photosensitivity or dermatitis when touched. Do not take medicinally if you are suffering from diabetes.

**How to grow**

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Angelica</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seeds immediately because they remain viable for only three months after harvesting. In early fall, sow in the ground or into seed-plug trays (see page 43) that are placed outside, exposed to all weathers. Seedlings are hardy and do not need protection from frost. Mature plants do not transplant well.

**SITE** Plant in deep moist soil, making sure the roots will be in shade and the flowers in sun. This is a good architectural plant and gives structure to an herb garden. It is not an ideal potted plant because of its height—up to 8 ft (2.5 m).

**MAINTENANCE** Make sure that seedlings and plants do not dry out. Keep well-watered in hot summers. Collect seeds for sowing in late summer. Cut the seedheads off before they drop onto the soil, or you will be inundated with seedlings. In exposed sites, stake long stems to prevent them from breaking.

**HARVESTING** In late spring or early summer, pick young, soft leaves to use fresh. Cut the stems of second-year growth in late spring before the flower heads form to use fresh or preserve as a candy. Collect ripe seeds in early fall.

**How to use**

Angelica is used to treat indigestion, anemia, coughs, and colds; a tea made from the young leaves helps alleviate nervous headaches. Stems of second-year growth can be candied or cooked with stewed fruit. Young leaves can be chopped up and added to salads, soups, and stir-fry dishes. The seeds are used in Moroccan cooking.



▲ *Angelica sylvestris* 'Vicar's Mead'

ANGELICA VICAR'S MEAD

A hardy, short-lived perennial with a height up to 6 ft (2 m) and a spread of 2½ ft (85 cm) in its second year. It produces domed umbels of lightly scented pale mauve-white flowers in late summer of the second season and has large, deeply divided, maroon leaves.





**Flower** is sweetly scented and has a warm, mildly aniseed flavor

► ***Angelica archangelica***

ANGELICA

A hardy, monocarpic herb, which dies after setting seed and has a height of up to 8 ft (2.5 m) and a spread of 3 ft (1 m) in its second year. It produces round umbels of sweetly-scented flowers in late spring to early summer of the second season, and has large, deeply divided, bright green leaves around the base of the plant, and smaller leaves around the stem.

**Stem** is hollow and lightly ribbed. It is the second-year's growth that is used to make candied angelica

**Leaf** is large, deeply divided and bright green. It has a dry flavor with a slightly bitter tang and a hint of aniseed.



**Angelica plants** give height and structure to an herb garden.

*Anethum***Dill** APIACEAE

Originating in the Middle East, dill can now be found throughout the world, and has naturalized in Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Scandinavia. There is evidence that it has been used for over 5,000 years, and it is mentioned in the Bible as a means of paying taxes. In the Middle Ages dill was used as a protection against witchcraft. Today it is well known as the active ingredient of gripe water, which is used to calm infants with colic or flatulence, and an infusion of dill seeds will relieve stomachache and digestive problems in adults.

**How to grow**

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation |
|----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Anethum</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In early spring, sow seeds under cover at 60°F (15°C); germination takes 5–20 days. Or sow seeds in late spring into prepared, open ground, when the air temperature at night stays above 45°F (7°C); germination takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 9 in (25 cm) apart. In my experience, sowing the seeds directly into open ground is the best method because this plant does not respond well to transplanting. Sow in small amounts at a time to provide a constant supply of leaves.

**SITE** Dill favors a well-drained soil and a sunny position sheltered from high winds. Do not plant dill near fennel because they can cross-pollinate and produce an inferior plant. Dill can be grown in large containers, but bear in mind that it dislikes being transplanted. Place the container in a sheltered position in full sun. It does not seem to grow well on kitchen windowsills.

**MAINTENANCE** After cutting, fertilize with comfrey liquid feed (see page 39) to promote new growth. In winter, dig up any remaining plants. Check that all the seeds have been removed to prevent self-seeding of this invasive plant, and then feed the remaining stalks to the compost heap.

**HARVESTING** In summer, cut back the leaves or the whole plant when it reaches about 1 ft (30 cm) high. Use the leaves fresh or dry. Preserve in butter or vinegars (see pages 222–225). Harvest seed when it turns brown, dry well, and store in a dark glass jar (see page 70).



**Seeds** have a sharper flavor than the leaves. Use fresh, dried, or roasted in vegetable dishes, soups, and breads.

**How to use**

This herb is used to treat dyspepsia, flatulence, and stomachache in adults—try a tea made with a teaspoon of dill seeds to ease these symptoms effectively.

▲ *Anethum graveolens*

DILL, DILLWEED

Hardy annual. Height up to 5 ft (1.5 m), spread 12 in (30 cm). The small flowers appear in summer, followed by aromatic seeds in late summer. The flower is good with fish dishes; it has a sweeter flavor than the leaf, with a hint of mint. The leaves have a mild, warm flavor that distinguishes them from fennel's aniseed taste.

*Anthriscus*

# Chervil

APIACEAE

This herb, native to the Middle East and the Caucasus, has been cultivated throughout Europe, North America, and Australia where, in some areas, it has naturalized. It is advisable not to collect chervil from the wild because it is similar in appearance to other plants of the same family, like hemlock, which is deadly poisonous. Chervil was a popular Lenten herb and was eaten on Maundy Thursday for its blood-cleansing and restorative properties. Medicinally, the leaves are very high in vitamin C, magnesium, iron, and carotene. A tea made from the leaves can stimulate digestion.

## How to grow

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Anthriscus</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Seeds are viable for one year. Sow in early spring under cover at 60°F (15°C); germination takes five to ten days. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground, when the air temperature at night stays above 45°F (7°C); germination takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 9 in (25 cm) apart. Chervil plants do not like being transplanted and will bolt and run to seed.

**SITE** Plant in a well-prepared site in a light but not too dry soil, in partial shade. Too much sun in summer will make chervil plants bolt and go to flower; they will also discolor and lose flavor. Chervil can be grown as a container plant in a large pot. Place outside in partial shade and water regularly. This herb does not grow very well on kitchen windowsills.

**MAINTENANCE** For fresh winter leaves, sow seeds in late summer. Cover with a cloche or horticultural fleece (see page 47) when the weather is wet or the temperature drops below -30°F (1°C).

**HARVESTING** The leaves can be picked for fresh use six to eight weeks after sowing. Always start with the outside leaves of the plant, leaving the new young shoots to develop.

## How to use

This useful culinary herb is one of the four ingredients of “fines herbes,” which include parsley, chives, and tarragon. In winter, late-sown chervil makes a good substitute for parsley. Use fresh leaves in salads, soups, chicken, fish, egg dishes, and sauces.



▲ *Anthriscus cerefolium*

CHERVIL

Hardy biennial that is grown as an annual. Height up to 24 in (60 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Clusters of tiny white flowers appear from spring until summer. It has light green leaves that can develop a purple tinge in early fall. The leaf flavor is sweet and slightly aniseed, and resembles a mixture of parsley and sweet cicely.



*Armoracia*

# Horseradish

BRASSICACEAE

This robust herb—native of western Asia—has naturalized in many countries and is found on waste ground and roadsides in North America, Britain, and New Zealand. Its common name, “horse,” is often used to mean a large, strong, or coarse plant. It has many excellent culinary and medicinal properties, and played a major part in my childhood, as I watched my mother grate the fresh root to make horseradish sauce to accompany the Sunday roast. You should avoid continuous dosage of horseradish if you are pregnant or suffering from kidney problems.



**Root** is high in vitamin C, calcium, sodium, and magnesium. It also has antibiotic properties.

## How to grow

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation   |
|------------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Armoracia</i> | Loam | Root cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** This plant is very easy to propagate from root cuttings, taken from spring up until late fall (see page 52). Either place the cuttings directly into a prepared site, 2 in (5 cm) deep and 12 in (30 cm) apart, or start the root cuttings off in individual pots, planting them out when the roots are established.

**SITE** Horseradish is invasive and difficult to eradicate from the garden once established. It will tolerate all but the driest of soils. Plant in a light, well-dug, rich, moist soil in a sunny position, or dappled shade. To contain the roots and keep the plant under control, grow it in a trash can. Make drainage holes in the container, and fill with rich soil. Place in partial shade.

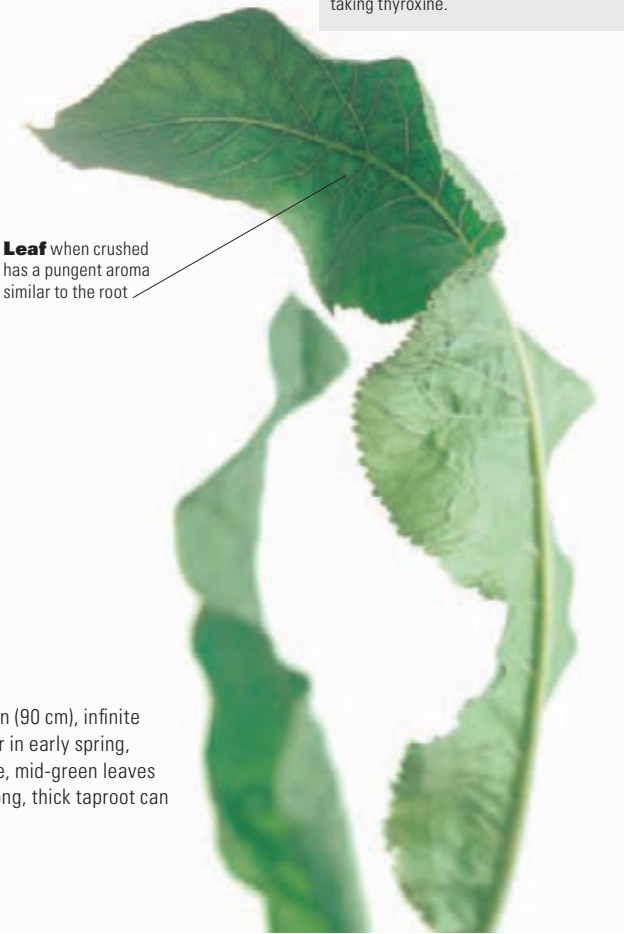
**MAINTENANCE** In the fall of the third season, after harvest, established clumps benefit from being divided and replanted in well-prepared soil that has been fed with well-rotted manure before they are replanted.

**HARVESTING** Pick young fresh leaves in spring and early summer. Dig up the root at any time between spring and early fall to use fresh. The strongest-flavored root is produced in the fall. Preserve the prepared root in vinegar.

## How to use

The fresh raw root is used as a condiment, but it loses all flavor when cooked. Medicinally, the root is a powerful circulatory stimulant with antibiotic properties. Horseradish is a good companion plant for root crops, helping build disease resistance. A spray made from an infusion of the leaves helps to prevent brown rot when applied to apple trees.

**CAUTION** Do not use if your thyroid function is weak, or if you are taking thyroxine.



**Leaf** when crushed has a pungent aroma similar to the root

► *Armoracia rusticana*  
HORSERADISH  
Hardy perennial. Height up to 36 in (90 cm), infinite spread. Tiny white flowers appear in early spring, though not every year. It has large, mid-green leaves that have a crinkled texture. Its long, thick taproot can reach up to 2 ft (60 cm) in length.

Arnica

# Arnica

ASTERACEAE

This plant is a native of the Rocky Mountains of North America and the Selkirk Mountains of British Columbia. Its name most probably derives from the Greek word “arnakis” meaning “lamb’s skin,” because of the soft texture of the leaves. It has many medicinal uses and is particularly effective for treating bruises and sprains. The flowers of the species *Arnica chamissonis* are commonly used to make the first-aid remedy. The rhizomes of *A. montana* can also be harvested for the same purpose, which has contributed to *A. montana* becoming an endangered plant in Europe.

## How to grow

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Arnica</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In the fall, sow fresh seeds into a loam-based substrate and place in a cold frame; germination takes three to four weeks. If no germination occurs, place the container outside so that the seeds are exposed to all weathers; germination can then take a further five to seven months or up to two years. A more reliable method of propagation is to grow new plants from root cuttings taken from the rhizomes in the spring.

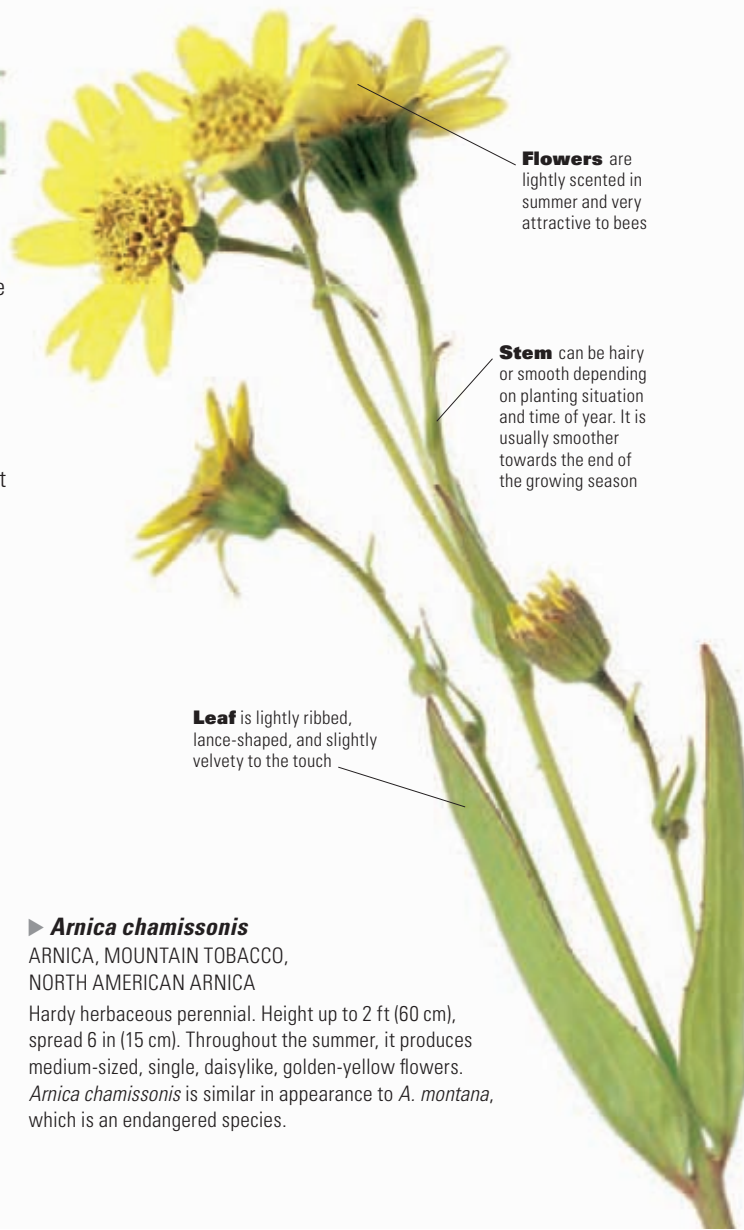
**SITE** Plant in sun or partial shade in an acid or alkaline sandy soil that is rich in humus. Arnica is well suited to rock gardens or medicinal herb gardens and grows well in containers. Use an ericaceous potting substrate. Arnica has creeping roots. In the fall, repot container-grown plants to protect the roots from excessive wet.

**MAINTENANCE** Deadhead flowers to prolong flowering. In the fall, collect fresh seeds for sowing immediately to provide quick germination.

**HARVESTING** In summer, pick the flowers just before they are fully open for medicinal use. Pick leaves for drying in summer.

## How to use

In homeopathy, arnica is used to treat symptoms of shock and injury. Arnica cream soothes chilblains, but should not be used if the skin is broken. A tincture can be used to treat angina, but only under supervision from a qualified practitioner.



**Flowers** are lightly scented in summer and very attractive to bees

**Stem** can be hairy or smooth depending on planting situation and time of year. It is usually smoother towards the end of the growing season

**Leaf** is lightly ribbed, lance-shaped, and slightly velvety to the touch

### ► *Arnica chamissonis*

ARNICA, MOUNTAIN TOBACCO, NORTH AMERICAN ARNICA

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 2 ft (60 cm), spread 6 in (15 cm). Throughout the summer, it produces medium-sized, single, daisylike, golden-yellow flowers. *Arnica chamissonis* is similar in appearance to *A. montana*, which is an endangered species.

Artemisia

# Artemisias

ASTERACEAE

The great culinary herb *Artemisia dracunculus* was used excessively by Catherine of Aragon, and was cited as a reason for divorce by Henry VIII. A native of southern Europe, true French tarragon (*A. dracunculus*) has a unique, light aniseed flavor, with a hint of warmth. It is not the same as Russian tarragon (*A. dracunculoides*), which has a paler, larger leaf and a pungent, slightly bitter flavor. Medicinally, French tarragon was used to heal snakebites and remove poisonous venom. A tea made from tarragon can help relieve insomnia and constipation, and aid digestion.

## How to grow

| Herb      | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------|------|-------------|
| Artemisia | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In spring, sow fresh seeds but do not cover with soil or perlite. Place under protection at 68°F (20°C). Germination takes 10–20 days. Take softwood cutting from lush new growth in early summer. Divide established plants in spring every three to four years. Replant in a well-prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in a well-drained light soil in a sunny position. Do not grow wormwood near culinary herbs because it can impair their flavor. Both wormwood and southernwood can be grown in large containers; use a well-draining loam substrate and protect the plants from excessive wet and cold in winter.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back wormwood stems to 6 in (15 cm) in fall. Cut back southernwood to 12 in (30 cm). In climates where the temperature drops below 30°F (-2°C) in fall, wait until the spring to cut stems back. In winter, protect the plants when the night temperature falls below 23°F (-5°C).

**HARVESTING** In summer, pick the herb's leaves for drying, and collect the flowers just as they open.

## How to use

Wormwood is best used as a moth repellent (see page 237). Try hanging bunches of wormwood leaves in a chicken coop to deter fleas, lice, and flies (see page 246). The leaves and roots produce a natural yellow dye for textiles.



▲ *Artemisia abrotanum*  
SOUTHERNWOOD, LAD'S LOVE

Hardy semievergreen shrub. Height and spread up to 3 ft (1 m). Tiny, dull yellow flowers form dense panicles in late summer, although they are rarely present in cool climates. It has aromatic, very finely cut, gray-green leaves. The leaves make one of the best natural moth repellents and a good mosquito repellent when rubbed on the skin.

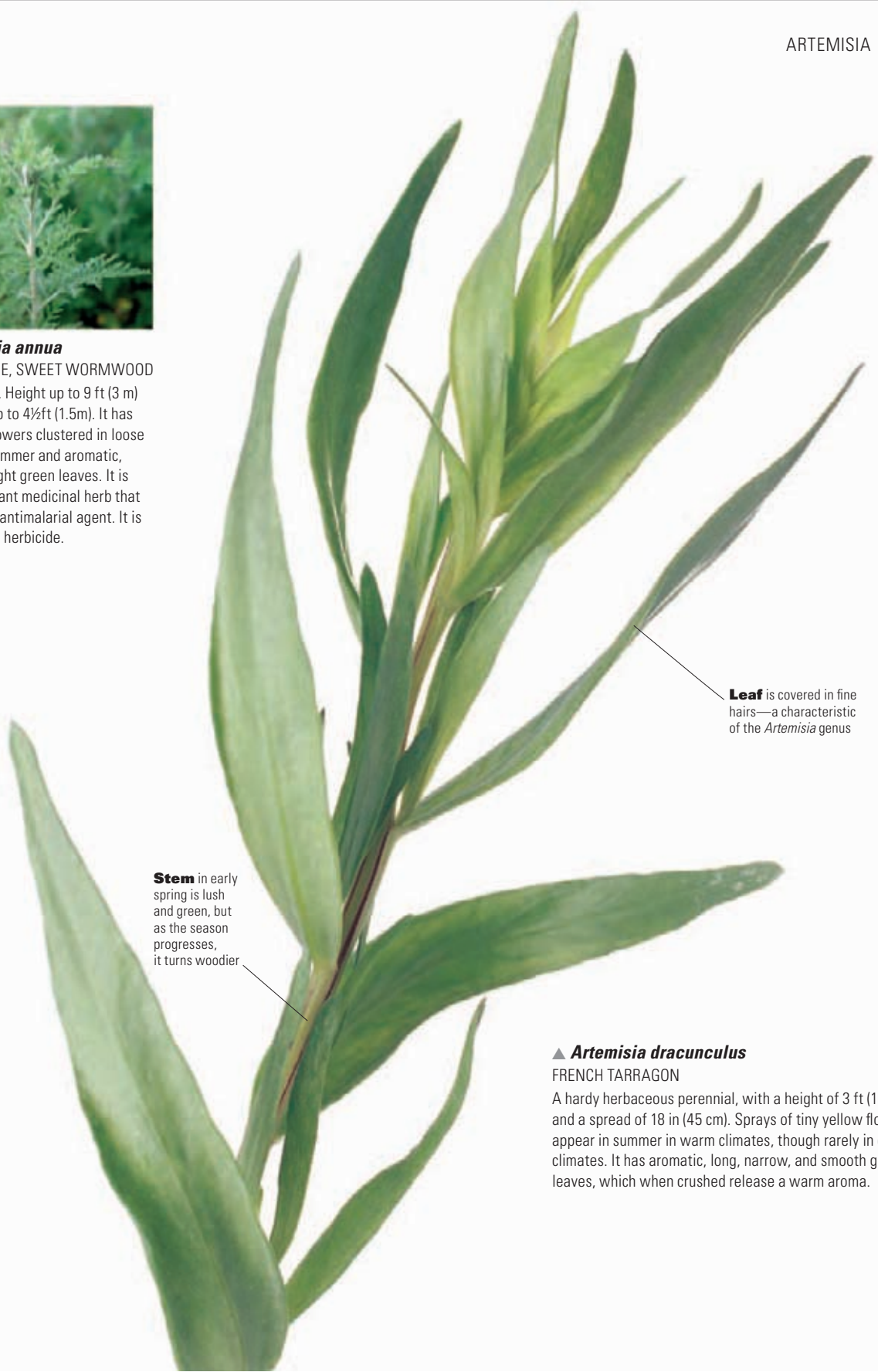




▲ *Artemisia annua*

SWEET ANNIE, SWEET WORMWOOD

Hardy annual. Height up to 9 ft (3 m) and spread up to 4½ ft (1.5 m). It has tiny yellow flowers clustered in loose panicles in summer and aromatic, finely cut, bright green leaves. It is a very important medicinal herb that is used as an antimalarial agent. It is also a natural herbicide.



**Leaf** is covered in fine hairs—a characteristic of the *Artemisia* genus

**Stem** in early spring is lush and green, but as the season progresses, it turns woody

▲ *Artemisia dracunculus*

FRENCH TARRAGON

A hardy herbaceous perennial, with a height of 3 ft (1 m) and a spread of 18 in (45 cm). Sprays of tiny yellow flowers appear in summer in warm climates, though rarely in cool climates. It has aromatic, long, narrow, and smooth green leaves, which when crushed release a warm aroma.

*Borago***Borage** BORAGINACEAE

This very pretty flowering herb originated in the Mediterranean, where it can be found growing on waste land. It has now spread and naturalized in North America and northern Europe. Historically, it was given to young Roman soldiers for courage and comfort, and borage flowers were given to the Crusaders—floated in stirrup cups—for the same reason. I am not sure about courage, but it raises the spirits to see these pretty summer flowers. It has several culinary and medicinal uses, but eaten excessively it can cause liver damage. The fresh leaves may cause contact dermatitis.

**CAUTION** Borage can cause liver damage if eaten in excess. Always consult a fully qualified herbalist.

**How to grow**

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Borago</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In early spring, sow seeds into pots under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination takes five to fourteen days. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground, when the air temperature at night does not drop below 45°F (7°C); germination takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 18 in (45 cm) apart. Once pot-grown seedlings are large enough to handle, plant them out in their final position; borage plants produce a long taproot and do not like being disturbed.

**SITE** Borage tolerates most soils, including clay, but prefers well-drained, light, poor soil in a sunny position. If the soil is too rich, it may grow tall and weak, and need staking. For this reason, it does not make a good container-grown plant.

**MAINTENANCE** Borage self-seeds easily, especially in light soils. Once the petals of the flowers drop, the seeds will appear. Collect those seeds that you want to propagate for next year's plants, and carefully remove any others.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh flowers just as they open fully. The best way to preserve the flowers is by freezing them with water in ice cube trays (see page 221). Pick fresh young leaves of *Borago officinalis* throughout the season.

**How to use**

Medicinally, the oil made from borage seeds is high in polyunsaturated fats. It is used to treat eczema, premenstrual complaints, and rheumatic problems. The fresh leaves of *B. officinalis* taste good added to salads, soups, and with cream cheese or yogurt.

◀ *Borago pygmaea*

PROSTRATE BORAGE, CORSICAN BORAGE

Hardy perennial. Height and spread 18 in (45 cm). It has small, star-shaped, bright blue flowers that fade to pink with age, and very bristly, oval, dark green leaves, which grow in basal rosettes. Only the flowers of this species are edible.

▲ *Borago officinalis*

BORAGE, STAR FLOWER

Hardy annual. Height and spread 24 in (60 cm). Loose racemes of blue star-shaped flowers with black stamens appear in early summer until the first frosts. The mid-green leaves are bristly, oval or oblong in shape, and succulent.

Bulbine

African bulbine ASPHODELACEAE

This attractive herb looks spectacular growing in drifts in its native habitat in the Western Cape of South Africa, which is where I was lucky enough to see it growing. It can also be found in the desert grasslands of the Northern and Eastern Capes; from here it has spread, becoming naturalized in Texas and many other warm, dry states of the USA, where it flourishes in the dry conditions. It was traditionally used by the Zulu not only to cure rashes, to stop bleeding, and as an antidote to poison, but also to treat their livestock; today, it is still used medicinally in South Africa by the Sangoma healers.

How to grow

| Herb    | Soil | Propagation       |
|---------|------|-------------------|
| Bulbine | Sand | Cuttings/division |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seed in late spring under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination takes ten to twenty days. Take cuttings, including the aerial roots, in early spring from container-raised plants, or late spring from garden-raised plants. In early summer, divide established garden plants using two forks back-to-back (see page 53), or by hand for pot-raised plants.

**SITE** This herb is a drought-loving plant that will survive a light frost. It can be planted out in cold climates in the early summer, and then lifted before the frosts. Plant in a well-drained, fertile soil that has been fed lightly with rotted manure the previous spring. Position in full sun or semi-shade, protected from cold winds. Alternatively, it will grow well in a container. Plant in a loam-based potting substrate mixed in equal parts with horticultural sand.

**MAINTENANCE** In warm, arid climates this is a low-maintenance plant. In cold and cool climates, protect when temperatures drop below 32°F (0°C). In winter, cut back the watering to a minimum, but do not allow the plant to dry out.

**HARVESTING** Leaves can be picked for use throughout the year.

How to use

The leaves are filled with a clear gel similar in appearance and consistency to aloe vera. This gel can be used directly on minor burns, wounds, cuts, abrasions, stings, and rashes. It can also be used to treat eczema, cracked lips, and herpes. The medicinal properties of this herb are currently under research, with the leaf gel being used to aid the healing of postoperative scars.



▲ *Bulbine frutescens*  
AFRICAN BULBINE, BURN JELLY PLANT, SNAKE FLOWER, CAT’S TAIL  
Frost-tender, evergreen perennial. Height 2 ft (60 cm), spread 3 ft (1 m). Attractive, star-shaped, yellow or orange single flowers appear sequentially throughout the summer. The leaves vary in length and are mid-green, cylindrical, narrow, and succulent.



*Buxus***Box** BUXACEAE

This ancient shrub was once widespread throughout Europe, eastern Asia, and North Africa. It was much in demand for its wood, which is close-grained and does not warp in adverse conditions, making it the ideal lumber for navigational instruments and printing blocks. Today, box is better known as a traditional knot garden hedge, whose clipped leaves have a pungent smell. All parts of the plant are poisonous, especially the leaves and seeds, and animals such as goats, cows, and sheep have died from eating the leaves.

**How to grow**

| Herb         | Soil | Propagation       |
|--------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Buxus</i> | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Take cuttings from new growth in spring and propagate in the shade. Rooting takes three to four months, but in shady conditions and warm temperatures—around 70°F (21°C)—it takes only six to eight weeks. Keep the cuttings moist but not over-wet. Alternatively, take semiripe cuttings in late summer and place in shade. Rooting should occur in eight to twelve weeks.

**SITE** Box favors an alkaline chalk or limestone soil, but it will adapt to all but waterlogged conditions, in sun or partial shade. It grows well in containers. Use a soil-based substrate and feed with liquid fertilizer like seaweed or comfrey in the growing season. *Buxus sempervirens* makes a good hedge. Prepare a trench with well-rotted manure and plant 15–18 in (37–45 cm) apart.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut box hedges in late spring, after the chance of frost has past, and again in early fall. Slow-growing varieties only need to be trimmed once, in summer. In fall, feed with well-rotted manure or a layer of fresh comfrey leaves (see page 37). If plants develop box blight, they will die back and leaves will become crisp and brown. Dig up infected plants and burn. Feed any remaining plants weekly with liquid comfrey (see page 39)—this can help build up the plant's resistance.

**HARVESTING** Cut sprigs from spring until late fall for use in floral arrangements.

**How to use**

Box is used medicinally by homeopaths as a tincture to treat rheumatism and urinary tract infections—this should only be done under supervision. Boxwood is used by cabinetmakers and wood turners to make furniture and chess pieces.



◀ *Buxus sempervirens*  
**'Latifolia Maculata' AGM**  
VARIEGATED GOLDEN BOX

Hardy evergreen shrub. Height and spread up to 3 ft (1 m). Its oval, shiny green leaves are splashed with gold. All new growth is very golden in the spring. Good for hedging.

**Leaf** is glossy on the upper surface, dull on the underside. It turns orange-brown when deficient in minerals



▶ *Buxus sempervirens*  
BOX, COMMON BOX

Hardy evergreen shrub, varying from bush to tree. Height up to 27 ft (9 m) and spread up to 15 ft (5 m). This plant is ideal for hedging, and is slow-growing and long-lived, with tiny, pale green flowers in early summer.

Calendula

Pot marigold ASTERACEAE

This well-known herb has been widely used in Arab and Indian cultures as a medicine, food colorant, and cosmetic. In medieval times, the flowers were considered an emblem of love; if marigolds appeared in your dreams, they were an omen of good things to come. Just looking at the sunny orange flowers was thought to cheer the spirits, and, in my opinion, they still do today. Excellent companion plants in the organic garden, pot marigolds (*Calendula officinalis*) deter asparagus beetles and tomato horn worms, but are not to be confused with *Tagetes* species (see page 200).

How to grow

| Herb      | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------|------|-------------|
| Calendula | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In early spring, sow seeds under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination takes 5–14 days. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground when the air temperature does not fall below 41°F (5°C) at night.

**SITE** Plant in any soil, except poor-draining, waterlogged soil, in a sunny position. They grow well in containers and combine well with other herbs.

**MAINTENANCE** To encourage continuous flowering, deadhead regularly. In light soils, pot marigold will self-seed abundantly; otherwise, it is manageable. Beware of slug attack and remove the pests from young plants. In late summer and early fall, leaves may contract powdery mildew. Destroy the affected leaves to prevent the disease from spreading.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh flowers as they open in early summer. Harvest young leaves to use fresh in salads.

How to use

The flower petals are used to make a natural gold-colored food dye for butter, biscuits, and omelets. Add young leaves to salads—the term “pot” marigold refers to its use in the cooking pot. Medicinally, marigold is known as a remedy for skin complaints; it is effective for most minor skin problems, cuts, scrapes, wounds, inflamed skin including minor burns, sunburn, and fungal conditions like athlete’s foot, yeast, and ringworm. It also helps alleviate diaper rash. The sap from the stem has a reputation for removing warts, corns, and calluses.



▲ *Calendula officinalis*  
POT MARIGOLD, MARIGOLD  
Hardy annual. Height and spread up to 24 in (60 cm). Large orange or yellow, daisylike, single or double flowers appear from spring until the first frosts. The light green, lance-shaped leaves are lightly aromatic. The flowers are sensitive to both to temperature variation and to dampness—open flowers forecast a fine day ahead.

*Calomeria***Incense plant** ASTERACEAE

I was given my first incense plant by a passionate plant collector. It has become rare in Britain because it is no longer grown in parks or large private estates. It is a most fantastic plant for scent—in flower, it will perfume the whole greenhouse and surrounding area—although, in full flower, its perfume can cause breathing difficulties. Historically, the plant arrived in England from Australia with the plant collector Sir Joseph Banks who gave some seed to Lady Hume (hence its former name *Humea elegans*). The leaves and bracts can cause skin irritation and burns.

**CAUTION** The fresh leaves and bracts can cause skin irritation and burns. The perfume can cause breathing difficulties when in full flower.

**How to grow**

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation |
|------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Calomeria</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** To achieve a very high germination rate, I suggest placing the dry seeds in a pillowcase and tumble-drying them on high for ten to fifteen minutes. In late fall, sow the seeds onto the surface of the substrate. Do not cover. Place in a light, well-aired, frostfree position. Germination takes 16–20 weeks. When the seedlings are large enough to handle, plant in a pot and grow until 12 in (30 cm) tall. Then pot up one size at a time, or plant out when the night temperature does not fall below 41°F (5°C). Take care not to transfer the plant to a larger pot size, or plant it outdoors too early, or you may cause it to “damp off.” This Madagascan plant is difficult to propagate in a cool climate.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in a sunny position. Choose a site where people will not brush against this plant because it may burn their skin. It also grows well in a container, using a soil-based substrate. Feed the young plant regularly from the appearance of the first bract.

**MAINTENANCE** This plant is very popular with whitefly when grown as a container plant. At the first sign of this pest on the leaf (look for slight curling), treat with a commercial horticultural soap according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

**HARVESTING** Pick the coral bracts for drying as soon as the flowers appear. The best indication, because the flowers are minute, is the change in color of the bracts from deep bronze to a light coral color.

**How to use**

The dried flowers look wonderful in fresh or dried floral displays. Their incredible incense scent lasts for a long time when the bracts are dried, adding another dimension to dried floral displays. The individual bracts add color and scent to potpourri (see page 237).



▲ *Calomeria amaranthoides* syn. *Humea elegans*

INCENSE PLANT, PLUME BUSH

Half-hardy biennial. Height up to 6ft (1.8m), spread up to 3ft (90 cm). Aromatic, delicate, coral bracts surround small, cream daisylike flowers and cascade from thin branches in summer. The mid-green leaves are large and oblong in shape, and aromatic.



*Capparis***Caper** CAPPARACEAE

This trailing, evergreen shrub, with its beautiful flowers, originated in the Middle East and can now be seen growing wild throughout the Mediterranean. I have seen it in the crumbling walls of an ancient ruin, near the seashore, and even in the rubble beside a newly built hotel. The Greek name, *kapparis*, is said to originate from the Persian *kabar*, hence “caper.” The first recorded use of capers for medicinal purposes was by the Sumerians in 2000 BC as a carminative. Today, the small flowering buds and the berries, which form after flowering, are used in many dishes throughout the Mediterranean.

**CAUTION** *Capparis spinosa* has incredibly sharp spikes, so wear gloves when handling this plant.

**How to grow**

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation       |
|-----------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Capparis</i> | Soil | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Caper seeds are minuscule. When sown fresh under cover in cool climates at 50°F (10°C) they germinate quickly; however, they do take a long time to grow into transplantable seedlings. Dry seed is dormant and needs to be soaked in hot water at 105°F (40°C) for a day, then put in the refrigerator for two to three months. After refrigeration, soak the seeds again in warm water overnight prior to sowing. Cuttings taken from the new spring growth are the best and most reliable method of propagation. .

**SITE** Plant in a well-drained soil in a hot, sunny location with little or no water. It hates damp cold wet winters so, if you live in northern regions, you will need to grow it in a container and place the container in a sheltered position for the winter. The caper bush is salt- and wind-tolerant, making it ideal for coastal gardens.

**MAINTENANCE** Flowers are borne on first-year branches, so cut plants back annually in the fall. Capers can tolerate the cold to 18°F (-7°C); however, the growing tips can be damaged even in light frost so cut these off in the following spring.

**HARVESTING** The flower buds are picked early in the morning for pickling and salting. The berries are picked when they are fully swollen and then pickled. As for the leaves, pick only young, succulent ones.

**How to use**

Fresh young caper buds, fresh caper berries, and fresh young leaves are either preserved in brine or pickled before eating. The pickled or salted buds are often served with pasta, pizzas, and in many sauces; one of the best known is tartar sauce, which is served with fish. The caper berry is served as a mezze and sometimes as a substitute for olives as a garnish. Caper leaves are used in salads or with fish dishes.



▲ *Capparis spinosa* var. *inermis*

**SPINELESS CAPER**

Evergreen shrub Height and spread up to 5 ft (1.5 m). Masses of edible green buds followed by solitary, white, four-petalled flowers with long, pink-purple stamens appear from early summer until autumn. It has oval, mid-green leaves with a hint of brown.

*Carum*

# Caraway

APIACEAE

I find it reassuring that this small biennial herb has survived and is still grown today for use in the kitchen and as a medicinal herb. Records show that it was used in the Stone Age, and it has been found in Egyptian tombs and at the ancient caravan stops along the Silk Road trade route. In Elizabethan feasts, eating caraway seeds became a traditional way to finish the banquet, and the herb was also reputed to ward off witches and to prevent lovers from straying. I like using the seeds and leaves in the kitchen for their flavor, and I love to grow the herb for its delicately pretty flowers.



**Seeds** have a strong distinctive flavor and are often considered a spice.

## How to grow

| Herb         | Soil | Propagation |
|--------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Carum</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh caraway seeds in early fall into prepared ground, when the air temperature does not fall below 45°F (7°C) at night; germination takes two to three weeks. Alternatively, sow fresh seeds in early spring under protection at 60°F (15°C), and germination will take five to ten days. Plant out as soon as possible with minimal root disturbance. It is important to use fresh seed because it remains viable for only one year.

**SITE** Plant in a fertile, well-drained soil, in a sunny position. Thin to 8 in (20 cm) apart. Caraway is not suited to container growing.

**MAINTENANCE** In the fall, clear weeds from around first-year plants. When the seeds have been harvested in the second fall, dig over the area well. If planting out young plants in spring, cover the plants with horticultural fleece to protect them from carrot-root fly; rotating the crop will reduce the risk of an attack.

**HARVESTING** Leaves can be picked fresh for use from the first-year crop; they have a mild parsleylike flavor. The seeds can be picked to use fresh from the second-year crop in early summer, or for drying as soon as they turn brown and start to drop from the flowerhead.

## How to use

The young leaves have a mild aniseed flavor and taste good in salads and soups. Use seeds sparingly or they may dominate other flavors. A small dish of seeds at the end of a spicy meal both sweetens the breath and aids digestion. Medicinally, caraway is an antispasmodic, diuretic, and expectorant. It is a mild remedy and is suitable for children, especially in cough remedies or to relieve colic.



▲ *Carum carvi*

CARAWAY, KÜMMEL

Hardy biennial. Height first season 8 in (20 cm), growing to 24 in (60 cm) in the second year with a spread of 12 in (30 cm). Tiny clusters of flowers in the early summer of the second season. It has feathery, bright green leaves that look similar to the leaves of carrots.

*Cedronella***Balm of Gilead** LAMIACEAE

Known as “Balm of Gilead,” *Cedronella canariensis* is native to the Canary Islands. It has a strong eucalyptus scent similar to other plants with “balsam” as part of their name (such as *Populus balsamifera* or *Commiphora opobalsamum*), which may be the explanation for why they share the same common name. When passing a plant, take the chance to rub some of the leaves between your hands and then sniff their head-clearing scent. Allow the plants to form seedheads to hear the seeds rattling in the breeze. This lovely aromatic herb also has the reputation of being an aphrodisiac.

**How to grow**

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation       |
|-------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Cedronella</i> | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring under protection at 68°F (20°C). Germination takes 14–20 days, but can be erratic. Take softwood cuttings in early summer. When the cuttings have rooted, pot up, and winter in a greenhouse or cold frame. Plant out the following spring at 3 ft (1 m) intervals.

**SITE** Plant in a warm sunny site against a south-facing wall in well-drained soil. In cool climates, when the night temperature falls below 29°F (-2°C), cover the plant with horticultural fleece, or bring it into a cool greenhouse or conservatory. In cold climates, it grows well as a container plant. Use a soil-based substrate. Trim the container plant to maintain its shape and to prevent it from becoming too tall.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back after flowering to keep the plant's shape and encourage new growth. Protect from hard frost. When grown as a container plant, the leaves can be prone to whitefly. Treat by introducing a predator or using horticultural soap, according to the manufacturer's instructions

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves for drying before the plant flowers. Harvest the flowers for drying as soon as they appear. Pick the seedheads when the flower petals have dropped. When dried, they look good in flower arrangements.

**How to use**

Balm of Gilead leaves can be used in hot water to make an infusion to clear the head or blocked nasal passages. An infusion of the leaves added to bath water has an invigorating effect. The leaves can be rubbed directly onto the skin as a mosquito repellent. Dried leaves can be added to potpourri (see page 236).

**Flower** varies in color from pale pink to mauve and is followed by black seedheads

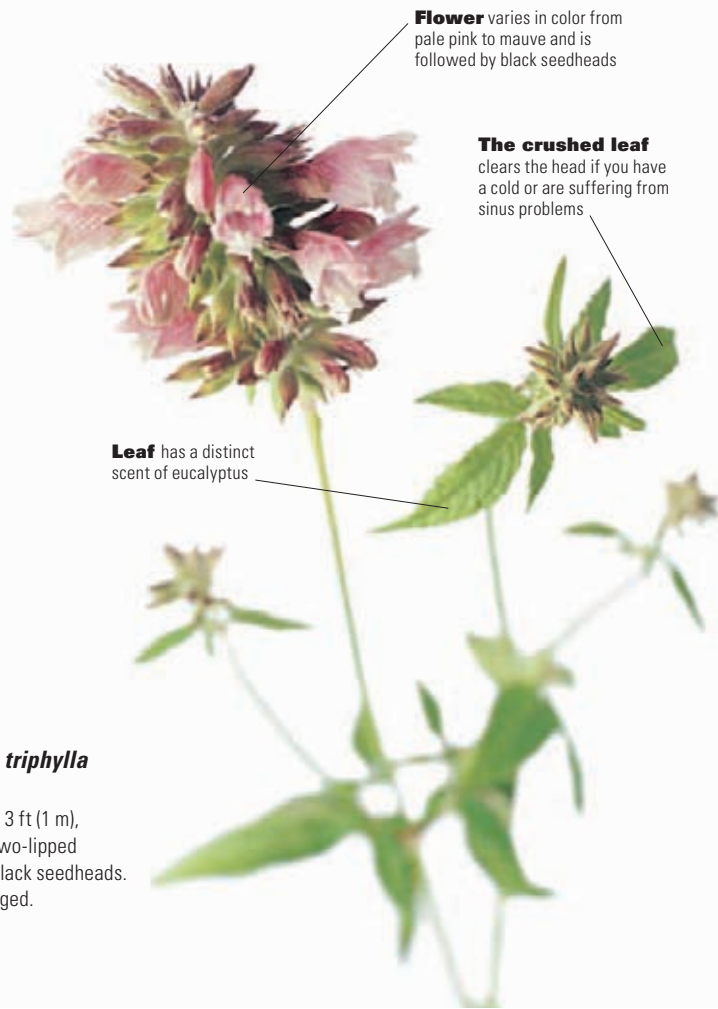
**The crushed leaf** clears the head if you have a cold or are suffering from sinus problems

**Leaf** has a distinct scent of eucalyptus

► ***Cedronella canariensis* syn. *C. triphylla***

BALM OF GILEAD, CANARY BALM

Half-hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 3 ft (1 m), spread 2 ft (60 cm). Pink to pale mauve two-lipped flowers appear in summer, followed by black seedheads. The leaves are three-lobed and tooth-edged.





*Centaurea*

# Cornflower

ASTERACEAE

This European wildflower, also known as “bachelor’s buttons”, almost became extinct in Britain in the 1970s as a result of the introduction of chemical weed controls in farming. The French eyewash “Eau de Casselunettes” was made from cornflowers because of their eye-brightening properties. Juice extracted from the petals makes a blue ink and a watercolor pigment. I adore the stunning blue flowers of this herb. They have little scent but dry very well, and can be added to potpourri for their attractive appearance. The blue blooms attract bees into the garden, which assists pollination.



The beautiful flowers of this herb are a striking shade of blue.

## How to grow

| Herb             | Soil      | Propagation |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|
| <i>Centaurea</i> | Sand/loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** For best results, sow seeds in open ground, when the air temperature does not fall below 50°F (10°C) at night. Germination will take 14–21 days.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in a sunny position. If you wish to create a natural meadow effect, clear all grasses and weeds and leave a 12 in (30 cm)-square area for each plant. Sow five seeds per patch but thin out once established, leaving two plants per area. In the fall, let the plants die back and self-seed naturally. Bachelor’s buttons can be grown in large containers using a soil-based substrate. Tie the fragile stems together for support and to minimize damage from high winds or heavy rain.

**MAINTENANCE** To produce straight stems for drying or flower arranging, you will need to support bachelor’s button stems with sticks or, if the plants have been sown in a row, with netting.

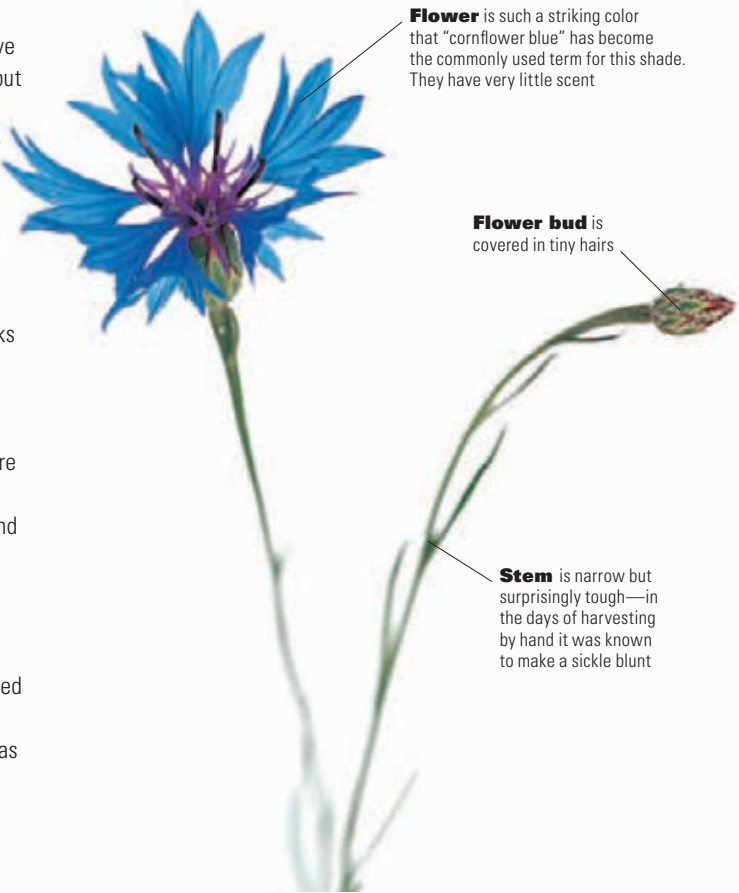
**HARVESTING** Bachelor’s buttons mature and fade within a few days of flowering. Pick the flowers when they are half open, and before the center stamens are visible. When drying flowers, tie bunches of 10 stems together and dry them fast; otherwise, the color will fade and their petals disintegrate.

## How to use

The petals of the flower are edible, and can be used to great effect scattered over salads, whether fruit, vegetable, or rice. A water distilled from bachelor’s buttons petals was traditionally used as a remedy for weak eyes—the famous French eyewash, “Eau de Casselunettes,” was made from them. The dried flowers look lovely added to potpourri.

### ▼ *Centaurea cyanus*

CORNFLOWER, BLUE BOTTLE, BACHELOR’S BUTTONS  
Hardy annual. Height 24 in (60 cm) and spread 6 in (15 cm). Single and double blue daisylike flowers in summer. The gray-green leaves are lance-shaped. The lower leaves are often toothed and covered with fine hairs. There are hybrids with the same habit that have pink, white, or purple flowers.



**Flower** is such a striking color that “cornflower blue” has become the commonly used term for this shade. They have very little scent

**Flower bud** is covered in tiny hairs

**Stem** is narrow but surprisingly tough—in the days of harvesting by hand it was known to make a sickle blunt

*Centella*

**Gotu kola** APIACEAE

This is an important medicinal herb, native to subtropical and tropical India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and South Africa, where it can be found growing in swampy areas including paddy fields. It was traditionally used to help wounds heal and slow the progress of leprosy. In India, it is a key herb in Ayurvedic medicine, but it did not become important in western medicine until the 1800s. Throughout Asia it is not only used as a medicinal herb, but is also eaten in salads or as a vegetable, where it is believed to stimulate the appetite and aid digestion.

**CAUTION** Excessive use of this herb taken internally or externally can cause itching, headaches, and even unconsciousness. Avoid if you are pregnant or nursing, using tranquilizers or sedatives, or have an overactive thyroid.

**How to grow**

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Centella</i> | Loam | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** Gotu kola is easily grown from cuttings. Take the cutting at the point where the leaf joins the stem, from spring until late summer. Alternatively, propagate it by division (see page 53) in summer. It rarely sets seed in cold climates.

**SITE** In tropical or subtropical climates, it will grow outdoors all year round. In cooler and cold climates it will tolerate temperatures down to 50°F (10°C) before it needs protection. It will grow in a container. Plant in a soil-based substrate in partial shade.

**MAINTENANCE** Protect from cold rain, frost, and snow. Repot every season and do not let the substrate dry out in the growing season. In warm summer weather, place the container outside. Container-grown plants are prone to red spider mite. Introduce *Phytoseiulus persimilis*—its natural predator—or treat the whole plant, stem included, with a commercial horticultural soap according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

**HARVESTING** Throughout the growing season, pick the young, succulent leaves and stems for use in salads, and the more mature leaves for cooking as a vegetable. To extract the juice, boil the leaves, then pound them into a paste for use on skin infections.

**How to use**

A rejuvenating diuretic herb that clears toxins and reduces inflammation. It is used in the treatment of rheumatism and rheumatoid arthritis. In India the fresh leaves are given to children for dysentery. It is also used there to help concentration and to treat leprosy. As a beauty aid, it stimulates the production of collagen and helps improve the tone of veins near the surface of the skin. The leaves are used in Sri Lanka and India as a vegetable.



▲ *Centella asiatica*  
GOTU KOLA, PENNYWORT, SPADELEAF  
Tender perennial. Height 3½ in (8 cm). A creeping plant with an indefinite spread. Tiny magenta flowers appear in summer, under the leaves. Although edible, the leaves of *C. asiatica* are slightly dry and tough in texture, and have a bittersweet flavor.

*Chamaemelum*

# Chamomile ASTERACEAE

Chamomile species can be a bit confusing because a number of different plants share the same common name. There is dyers' chamomile (*Anthemis tinctoria*), which produces bright yellow through to olive natural dye colors for textiles; wild chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*), which is principally used in medicine; and, of course, chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), which is one of our most favorite old garden herbs. The delicate flowers are used fresh or dried to make a calming herbal tea that can be taken for insomnia and digestive disorders.

## How to grow

| Herb      | Soil      | Propagation    |
|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| Chamomile | Sand/loam | Seeds/cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Chamomile has very fine seeds, which may wash away when sown in the ground, so it is best started in early spring under protection at 65°F (18°C). Germination takes 14–20 days. Take cuttings in spring and fall from the offsets. Divide established plants in spring, replanting in a well-prepared site.

**SITE** Although chamomile adapts to most soils, except wet, it favors well-drained soil in a sunny position. All *Chamaemelum* species grow well in containers in a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back after flowering to encourage new growth and to prevent the plant from becoming straggly. If you are making a chamomile lawn, do not let the plants dry out in summer. Roll once a week through the growing season.

**HARVESTING** Pick chamomile flowers just as they open fully, to use fresh or to dry.

## How to use

Renowned for its sedative properties, a tea made from the fresh or dry flowers relieves insomnia, digestive disorders, travel sickness, and hyperactivity in children. Use a chamomile infusion as a gargle for mouth ulcers or as an eyewash. This infusion can also be applied to the skin to soothe burns. A hair rinse made with chamomile flowers lightens fair hair. Chamomile is known as the “physician plant”—because when planted next to sick plants, it helps them revive. A spray made from the leaves and flowers helps prevent “damping off” of seedlings. Fresh chamomile leaves can also be added to the compost heap to help activate the process of decomposition (see page 37).



◀ *Chamaemelum nobile* ‘Treneague’  
LAWN CHAMOMILE

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height 2 in (6 cm) and spread 6 in (15 cm). If grown as a lawn, roll once a week in the growing season to encourage the stems to root into the ground, avoiding brown patches. Lawn chamomile can only be propagated from cuttings.



▲ *Chamaemelum nobile* ‘Flore Pleno’  
DOUBLE-FLOWERED CHAMOMILE

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height 3 in (8 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Produces small, double daisylike flowers throughout the summer and dense, aromatic, finely divided foliage. It can provide good ground cover for lawn areas and between paving stones. Harvest the flowerheads just as they open in summer and use fresh.





**Flower** is daisylike with a yellow center and a light scent

**Stem** of the flower has individual leaves spaced along its length

**Leaf** is finely divided and very aromatic when crushed

◀ *Chamaemelum nobile*

CHAMOMILE, ROMAN CHAMOMILE

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height 4 in (10 cm) in the green and 12 in (30 cm) when in flower. Spread 18 in (45 cm). It produces large, single, white daisylike flowers throughout the summer months. The finely divided foliage is green and sweet-smelling when crushed underfoot or between the fingertips.

*Chenopodium*

**Goosefoot** CHENOPODIACEAE

When I first came across Good King Henry, I was intrigued by its unusual name and wanted to find out more—it is one of the reasons I became an herb farmer—so I have a special affection for this plant. I wondered whether there was a “Bad Henry” and how this herb that looked like spinach could be used in cooking. I have since discovered that this unassuming plant is rich in vitamins and that the “Bad Henry” is, in fact, *Mercurialis perennis* (dog mercury), a poisonous woodland plant. Good King Henry and tree spinach are both coming back into favor in today’s kitchen.

**How to grow**

| Herb               | Soil | Propagation |
|--------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Chenopodium</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring, under cover at 65°F (18°C); germination takes 14–20 days. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring, when the air temperature at night does not fall below 45°F (7°C), sowing seeds into prepared open ground, in ½ in (1 cm) drills, leaving 18 in (45 cm) between rows, and covering the seed with ¼ in (6 mm) soil; germination takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 12 in (30 cm) apart. In spring, divide established plants of perennial species only. Replant into a prepared site fed with well-rotted manure.

**SITE** For a good leaf crop, plant in soil that has been fed the previous fall with rotted manure. It will tolerate most soil conditions except waterlogged soils, but it favors free-draining soil and a sunny position. It will grow well in containers in a loam-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** Keep well-watered in the summer months. Feed the soil in the fall with well-rotted manure. Renew perennial species every three to four years. Collect seeds or cut back in late summer to early fall to prevent self-seeding.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves to use fresh in spring until late summer. Pick seeds in late summer, just as they ripen. Dry and store seeds for later use (see page 70).

**How to use**

The young leaves are rich in iron, calcium, and vitamins B1 and C, and can be added to salads. Treat mature leaves like spinach. Steam the flowers and eat like asparagus. Ground seeds can be used as flour, or made into a tea, which can have a mild laxative effect.



◀ *Chenopodium bonus-henricus*  
GOOD KING HENRY

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 24 in (60 cm) and spread 18 in (45 cm). It produces tiny greenish yellow flowers in summer and has large, mid-green leaves. The plant is also used to fatten poultry and as a remedy for coughs in sheep.

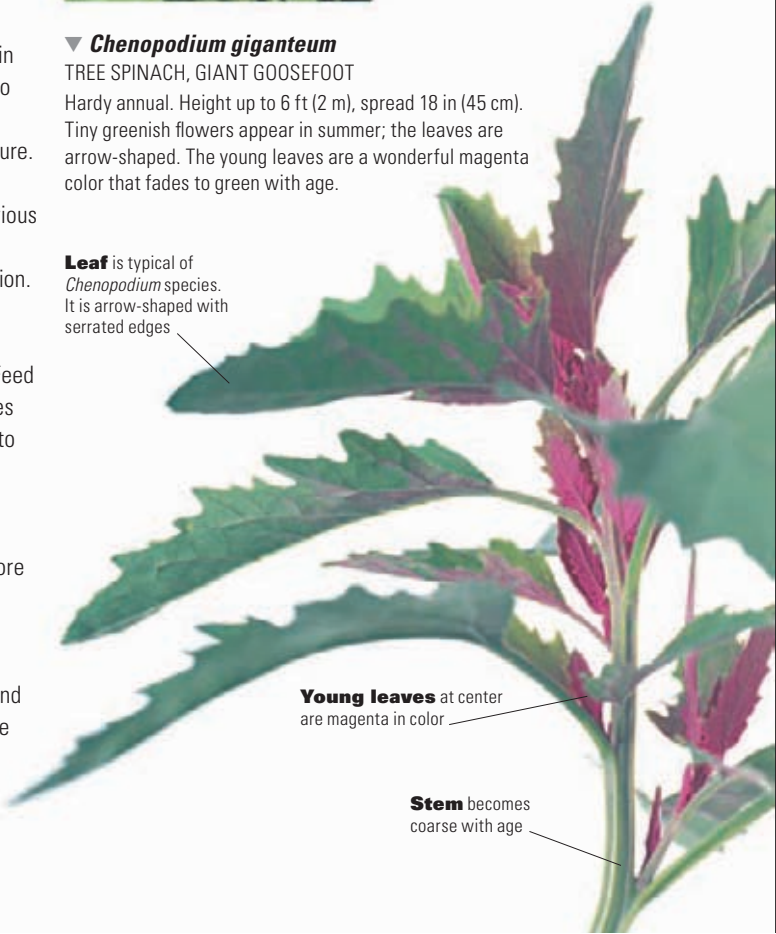
▼ *Chenopodium giganteum*  
TREE SPINACH, GIANT GOOSEFOOT

Hardy annual. Height up to 6 ft (2 m), spread 18 in (45 cm). Tiny greenish flowers appear in summer; the leaves are arrow-shaped. The young leaves are a wonderful magenta color that fades to green with age.

**Leaf** is typical of *Chenopodium* species. It is arrow-shaped with serrated edges

**Young leaves** at center are magenta in color

**Stem** becomes coarse with age



*Cichorium*

# Chicory

ASTERACEAE

Chicory was first used by the ancient Egyptians as a medicinal herb, vegetable, and salad plant. In the Napoleonic era, roasted chicory roots were found to make an ideal coffee substitute, and can still be found in French coffee today. It grows wild throughout America, Europe, and Australia. The leaves of chicory have a mild, bitter flavor and are excellent in salads. In winter, chicons are produced by forcing the roots in warmth and darkness, which blanches the new growth; these are often called “endives”. The edible flowers can add visual interest to a salad or rice bowl.

**CAUTION** Medicinally, chicory should be used with care because excessive use impairs retinal function.

## How to grow

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation |
|------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Cichorium</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring under cover at 60°F (15°C); germination takes five to ten days. Alternatively, sow seeds in summer into prepared open ground. Germination takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 4–12 in (10–30 cm) apart, closer together for leaves, farther apart for flowers because it needs space to run to flower.

**SITE** Chicory prefers a light, alkaline soil, although it will adapt to all but heavy clay. Plant in a sunny site. This tall plant is not suitable for growing in containers.

**MAINTENANCE** In the fall, cut down the flowering stems and collect seeds for next year’s sowing. Dig in well-rotted manure. If you want substantial roots, do not allow the plant to flower. To force the plant to produce leaves in winter, dig up some of the roots in late fall, and cut off the plant tops to just above ground level. Plant the roots in a box filled with loam-based substrate so the crowns sit at soil level. Water well and keep the plants in the dark with the temperature above 50°F (10°C). In four to six weeks, the root will produce 6–8 in (15–20 cm)-long chicons (blanched leaves).

**HARVESTING** The leaves can be picked to use fresh from late spring onward. Pick fresh flowers from second-year plants throughout the summer. Chicons (forced roots) can be picked throughout the late fall and winter. These should be used quickly, because once they are introduced to the daylight the foliage can become limp.

## How to use

We need to learn to appreciate bitter foods like chicory because they are very beneficial to the digestive system. Add leaves to salads fresh, or blanch quickly to reduce the bitter flavor. Medicinally, a tea made from the leaves is a gentle tonic that increases the flow of bile.



### ▲ *Cichorium intybus*

CHICORY, SUCCORY

Hardy perennial. Height 3 ft (1 m) and spread 1 ft (30 cm). In the second season, it produces clear, blue, single flowers from summer until early fall. The oval, midgreen leaves are coarsely toothed with tiny hairs on the underside.



*Coriandrum***Coriander** APIACEAE

This important culinary and medicinal herb has been cultivated for over 3,000 years and is mentioned in the Old Testament. The Chinese believed it bestowed immortality, and in the Middle Ages it was an ingredient of love potions. Coriander is an interesting culinary plant because its seeds and leaves have two distinctly different flavors, and the whole plant is edible. The seed is warm and aromatic with a hint of orange, while the leaf is pungent and oily, with a hint of earth in its distinctive taste. *Coriandrum sativum* has wonderful leaf flavor and is a good species to grow for cooking.



**Seeds** are aromatic with a mild orange flavor. Use whole or crushed.

**How to grow**

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Coriandrum</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring under protection at 65°F (18°C); germination takes five to ten days. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground when the air temperature at night remains above 45°F (7°C); germination takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 2 in (5 cm) intervals for a leaf crop, or 9 in (23 cm) for a seed crop (seed plants need more space). In my opinion, sowing the seeds direct into the open ground gives the best crop. Coriander does not like to be transplanted, and may bolt and run to seed. Sow in small amounts at weekly intervals to give a constant supply of leaves.

**SITE** Plant in light, well-drained soil in a sunny position. This plant dislikes damp and humid conditions. *Coriandrum sativum* 'Leisure' is the one variety of coriander that grows well in containers. It produces a good amount of leaves and is slow to run to seed.

**MAINTENANCE** As the coriander seeds ripen, support plant stems with stakes because they become top-heavy. Once the seed is harvested, pull up the plant and dig over the plot.

**HARVESTING** From late spring until late summer, cut the fresh leaves and eat as required—they do not store well. Pick flowers to use fresh throughout the summer. Harvest seeds from summer on.

**How to use**

The leaves taste earthy and aromatic, and should be added at the end of cooking to preserve their flavor, while the seeds have a warm, spicy flavor with a hint of orange. Medicinally, coriander stimulates appetite. Add the larger leaves only at the end of cooking as a condiment and garnish.

▼ *Coriandrum sativum*

## CORIANDER

Annual. Height 24 in (60 cm) and spread 9 in (23 cm). It bears white flowers in summer followed by round seeds. The first and lower leaves are broad and scalloped, with a strong scent and flavor; the upper leaves are finely cut with a pungent taste.

**Flowers** are white and appear in the summer

**Leaf** of the first growth, before flowering, is the one used in cooking. It is pungent and oily, with a hint of earth

**Stem** is weak and needs staking when seeds begin to form



*Crithmum*

# Sea fennel

APIACEAE

This seaside herb, found growing on cliffs and rocks and at the water's edge, is a native of the coasts of the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and the Black Sea, where it has been dedicated to St Peter, the patron saint of fishermen. It has been used as a vegetable for centuries. I first saw it growing wild on a beach vacation with my children. Having crushed the salty, succulent leaves between my fingertips, I was sure it was an herb and was delighted to find that I could use it in cooking. I now grow it successfully away from its natural habitat.

## How to grow

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Crithmum</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seeds in the fall under protection at 50°F (10°C); germination takes two to three weeks. If no germination occurs within that period, place the container in a refrigerator for four weeks to stratify the seeds, then return to a protected environment; germination should occur within four to six weeks. During winter, keep seedlings in a frostfree environment and plant out the following spring. Propagate established plants by division (see page 53) in spring. Replant in a well-prepared site.

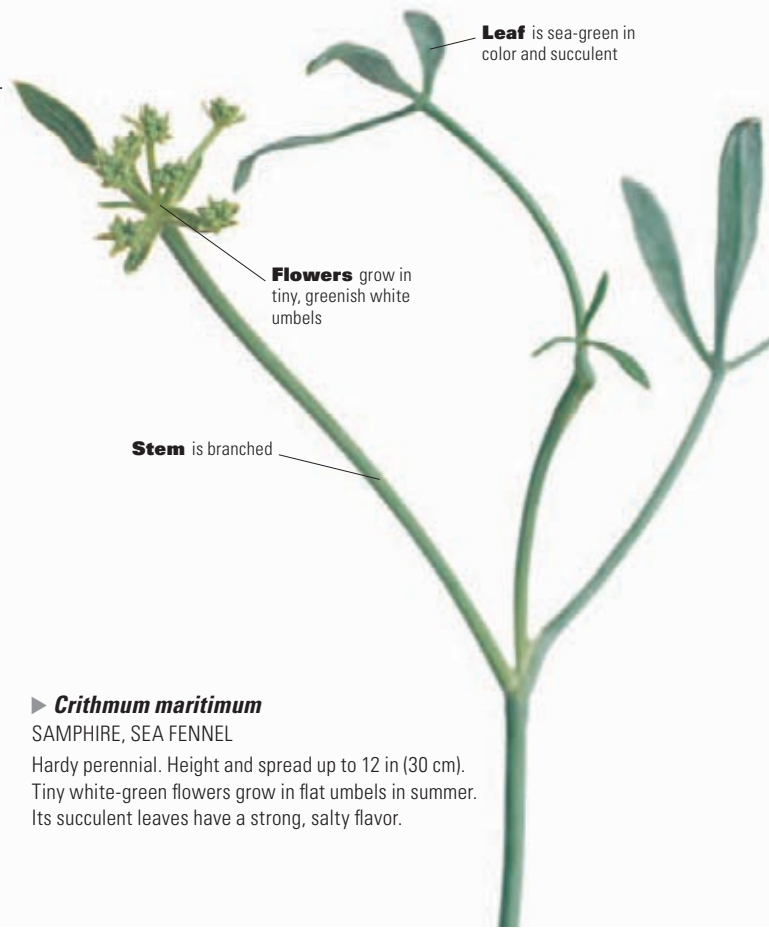
**SITE** Sea fennel favors a well-drained site with extra grit added to the soil. Plant in a sunny position and protect from cold winds. Protect from hard frosts and temperatures below 23°F (-5°C). Do not mulch or feed with well-rotted manure. This plant grows well in containers in a soil-based substrate mixed equally with grit.

**MAINTENANCE** In spring, divide established plants. From late summer until early fall, collect the ripe seed and sow immediately into pots or prepared module trays. Winter in a cold frame or greenhouse.

**HARVESTING** Pick the young stems, the young succulent leaves, and the green seedpods in early summer to use fresh in the kitchen or for use in pickling. Please note that this herb is not marsh samphire or glasswort (*Salicornia europaea*), with which it is often confused.

## How to use

This plant is rich in sulfates, iodine compounds, and pectin. Medicinally, it relieves flatulence, eases digestion, and is a diuretic. There is research into its uses for treating obesity. The leaves can be eaten in salads, cooked in butter, or used to make sauces and a pickle that is very aromatic. The leaves also have a high vitamin C content, and contain a fragrant oil that is rich in eugenol and other fragrant substances that are widely used in modern perfumery and medicine.



### ► *Crithmum maritimum*

SAMPHIRE, SEA FENNEL

Hardy perennial. Height and spread up to 12 in (30 cm). Tiny white-green flowers grow in flat umbels in summer. Its succulent leaves have a strong, salty flavor.

*Curcuma***Turmeric** ZINGIBERACEAE

This tropical herb is regarded as one of the most valuable to mankind. The early Assyrian herbal records show that it has been in use for over 2,500 years. It most probably originated from India where it is used not only in the kitchen, but also as an important herbal remedy with curative and cleansing properties. It is considered sacred by Hindus and Buddhists and is widely used in Indian wedding ceremonies, particularly in North India. Recent research indicates that the rhizome is potentially beneficial in treating many illnesses, including cancer, high cholesterol, and dyspeptic conditions.

**CAUTION** If the roots are cut, their yellow sap will stain fingers or cloth indelibly.

**How to grow**

| Herb           | Soil      | Propagation   |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|
| <i>Curcuma</i> | Peat/loam | Root cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Take root cuttings from fresh roots with a growing node; the best supply outside the tropics is from Asian and Caribbean shops. Fill a shallow container, not much larger than the root, with seed potting substrate mixed in equal parts with horticultural grit. Add the root, tooth-bud facing up, and cover with potting mix, leaving the bud just showing. Place in a plastic bag, seal, and store under protection at 68°F (20°C) for three to four weeks. Once the shoots emerge, remove the plastic bag, maintain warmth, and protect the cuttings from direct sunlight.

**SITE** Outside the tropics this herb will adapt to being container-grown, and will produce a good supply of leaves but not much root. Use a loam-based potting substrate, mixed in equal parts with horticultural grit. Keep warm, at a minimum night temperature of 64°F (18°C). Protect from direct midday sun because the leaves will scorch.

**MAINTENANCE** In spring, divide the rhizomes and pot up into a container just big enough to hold them. Do not over-pot, which can cause the rhizome to rot in cool climates. In the fall, reduce the watering of container plants and keep in a frost-free greenhouse.

**HARVESTING** Harvest the rhizome in late summer or early fall. The leaves can be used as a flavoring; pick them as required throughout the growing season. The rhizome is dried and powdered to make the well-known ground spice.

**How to use**

In Malaysia the young rhizomes are eaten fresh in ulam, a Malay salad. The powdered rhizome is an essential ingredient in Asian cuisine; it is used in virtually every Indian meat, vegetable, and lentil dish. The leaves of the turmeric plant are used fresh to wrap fish or sweets before steaming. Medicinally, it is a very good first-aid remedy and can be used to treat gastric disorders. Turmeric has been used as a yellow dye for centuries; it is used to color medicine, confectionery, paints, varnishes, and fabrics.

▲ *Curcuma longa*

TURMERIC, INDIAN SAFFRON, HALDI, HARIDRA, KUNYIT

Topical/subtropical, herbaceous perennial. Height 3 ft (1 m) and indefinite spread. The yellow and white flowers, with pink tinges at the tips of the petals, appear in spring on a single stem surrounded by pale green bracts. The long, oval, mid-green, leaves are aromatic. The root is a large rhizome.



*Cymbopogon*

# Lemon grass

POACEAE

This important culinary and medicinal herb grows in tropical regions and is used extensively in Asia, India, and Thailand. I have been lucky enough to see it growing and flowering naturally in the Caribbean, where it is used primarily for reducing fever. In Malaysia, it is used extensively as a flavoring agent, as well as in perfumery and aromatherapy. This useful plant has a strong lemon flavor and can be grown successfully outside in temperate climates, although it rarely flowers in cooler regions or when cultivated. It is now grown commercially for its widely used essential oil.



**Stems** are cut at ground level; they have an intense lemon flavor, and are used in cooking and medicine.

## How to grow

| Herb              | Soil       | Propagation |
|-------------------|------------|-------------|
| <i>Cymbopogon</i> | Sand/chalk | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring under cover at 68°F (20°C); germination takes 15–25 days. Pot in a loam-based substrate, and grow on until well established. In warm climates, plant out in the garden, but in cooler regions, grow as a container plant. In spring, propagate established plants by division. Keep at least two crowns per clump. In warm climates, replant into the ground, or into containers in cool climates.

**SITE** In regions where temperatures at night do not fall below 48°F (8°C), the summer days are hot and wet, and the winters warm and dry, lemon grass will grow outside in any soil. In cool climates, grow as a potted plant in soil- or loam-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** When light levels drop, this plant goes dormant. In the fall, move to a frostfree site with a temperature no less than 40°F (5°C). Reduce watering to a minimum. In early spring, as the plant starts to produce shoots, increase the heat and light, and cut back all dead growth and stalks to 2 in (5 cm). Repot the lemon grass plants if necessary and liquid-feed once a week.

**HARVESTING** The best-flavored lemon grass leaves are obtained from the lower 4 in (10 cm) of the plant. Pick them throughout the growing season to use fresh or dry. The lower white section of the plant's stem also has a concentrated lemon flavor, and is harvested during the summer months.

## How to use

A tea made from fresh leaves is a stomach and gut relaxant. The essential oil is antiseptic and deodorizing, and is used in perfume, in poultices to ease pain and arthritis, and as an insect repellent.

► ***Cymbopogon citratus***  
LEMON GRASS, FEVER GRASS  
Half-hardy perennial., evergreen in warm climates. Height 5 ft (1.5 m) and spread 3 ft (1 m). It has lemon-scented, linear leaves that grow up to 3 ft (1 m) in length, and robust, canelike stems.

**Leaves** are sharp and rough to the touch, with a lemon scent when crushed between the fingers



*Cynara*

**Cardoon** ASTERACEAE

This large, attractive herb has been in cultivation for thousands of years as a vegetable and as a gentle laxative. *Cynara cardunculus* is currently popular as an ornamental plant for adding structure and height to the garden. In Australia, where it is classified as a weed, its potential is being researched as winter fodder for livestock, a vegetable oil (extracted from the seed), and an environmentally friendly energy source. The flower buds and blanched leaves, roots, and stalks are the edible parts, but I consider the taste inferior to the more familiar globe artichoke, *Cynara scolymus*.

**How to grow**

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Cynara</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring under cover at 65°F (18°C); germination takes five to ten days. Or sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground, when the air temperature at night does not fall below 45°F (7°C); germination takes two to three weeks. Alternatively, in spring or fall, take the suckers (sideshoots) off the main stem and set them in pots filled with loam-based substrate. When they have taken root, plant out (after all threat of frost has passed).

**SITE** Plant in a sunny site in well-drained, deep, fertile soil that has been fed the previous fall with well-rotted manure. Space young plants at 36-in (90-cm) intervals.

**MAINTENANCE** When grown in hot, dry conditions, cardoon leaves and stalks become pithy and tough and the flower bud hardens, making all parts inedible. To prevent this, maintain a good supply of water throughout the growing season. In the fall, feed the soil around established cardoon plants with well-rotted manure.

**HARVESTING** To produce edible blanched artichoke leaves, tie the mature outer leaves together, and wrap the whole plant in sacking to shield it from the light. Leave for four to five weeks. Unwrap and harvest the blanched leaves around the heart. Pick flower buds before the outer green bracts start to open. Collect seeds in early fall as the flowers drop. When harvesting, wear gloves and beware of prickles.

**How to use**

Cardoon is a detoxifier that helps the liver regenerate and stimulates the gall bladder. The blanched leaves, ribs, and stalks are used as a winter vegetable.



▲ *Cynara cardunculus*

CARDOON

Perennial. Evergreen in warm climates. Height 6 ft (2 m) and spread 4 ft (1.2 m). The flowers are very attractive to bees and butterflies, and the seeds that follow are also a good food source for garden birds.

*Digitalis***Foxglove** SCROPHULARIACEAE

This herb is native to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and North America, where, in some states, it is classified as a weed. The common name, “foxglove,” is said to have derived from the Anglo-Saxon “foxglue” or “foxmusic” after the shape of a musical instrument of that period. It became very important medicinally in the late 1700s when William Withering developed the use of *Digitalis* in the treatment of heart disease. Despite the high toxicity of the plant and its seed, infusions made from the leaves of foxgloves were often used in traditional country medicine to treat common ailments.

**CAUTION** The whole plant, including the seeds, is highly poisonous.

**How to grow**

| Herb             | Soil      | Propagation |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|
| <i>Digitalis</i> | Clay/loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seeds in the fall. The seed is very fine, so mix it with flour to make the dark seeds more visible as you sow them. Do not cover the seed. Place the seed tray outdoors or in a cold frame. Germination takes five to seven weeks.

**SITE** Foxgloves adapt to most conditions, except for dry, exposed sites. They prefer partial shade in a moist but well-drained acid soil, enriched with leafmold. They also grow well in containers, in a soil-based substrate. Place the container in partial shade and shelter the plant from high winds—they grow very tall in the second year.

**MAINTENANCE** Water well in dry weather. During the first winter, protect the plants if the temperature at night falls below 14°F (-10°C). Use leafmold to enrich the soil around established plants (see page 37). In the second season, remove the main flowering spike (after flowering) to increase the size of the others. Foxgloves self-seed, so if you want to keep plants under control, pick out seedlings. Pot a few seedlings as insurance against hard winters. Thin out plants if they are overcrowded. Wear gloves because just touching the plant may cause rashes, headaches, and nausea.

**HARVESTING** In summer, the pharmaceutical industry harvests the leaves from second-year growth for the extraction of glycosides. This should only be done by a trained professional.

**How to use**

This herb is an important medicinal plant for treating heart failure. However, it should never be used by the amateur, nor used for self-medication. It should only be administered by a professional.

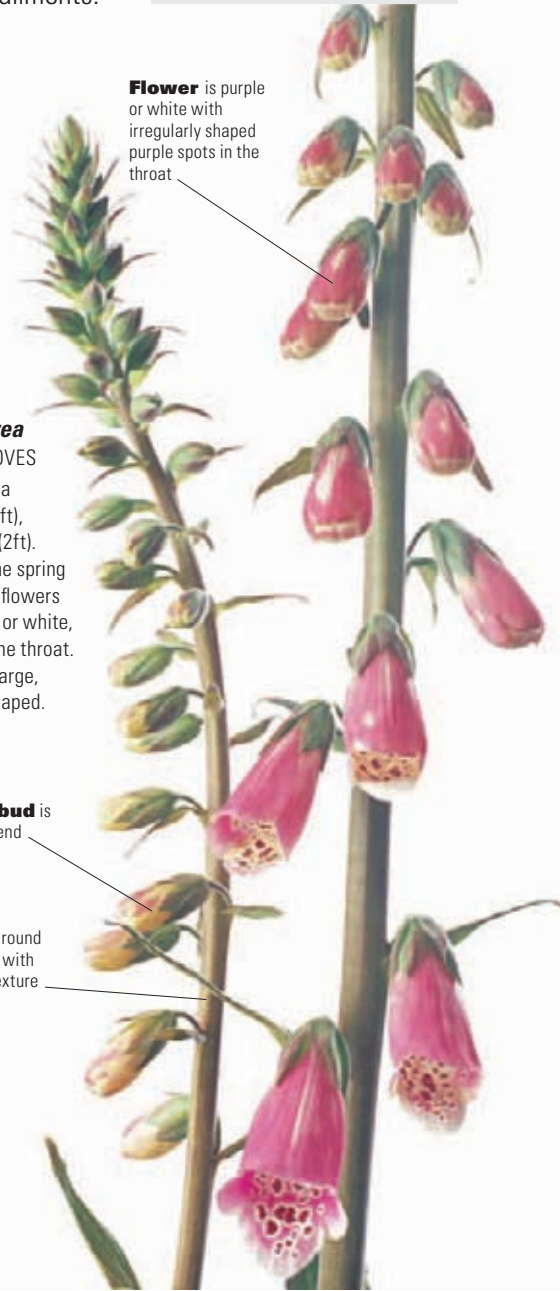
► ***Digitalis purpurea***  
FOXGLOVE, FAIRY GLOVES

A hardy biennial, with a height of up to 1.8m (6ft), and a spread of 60cm (2ft). Plants first flower in the spring of the second season; flowers are tubular and purple or white, with purple spots on the throat. The green leaves are large, textured, and lance-shaped.

**Flower** is purple or white with irregularly shaped purple spots in the throat

**Flowerbud** is sealed at end

**Stem** is round and green with a velvet texture





*Diplotaxis***Wild rocket** BRASSICACEAE

A form of this herb can be found growing wild throughout Europe, Asia, and North and South America. For hundreds of years it has been collected in the wild and sold in markets, and both the leaves and seeds of rocket were used as flavoring by the Romans. Today rocket is increasingly popular as a fresh salad herb, and adds a distinctive peppery, beefy flavor; it has a much stronger taste than its close relative, arugula (*Eruca vesicaria* subsp. *sativa*) and can be distinguished by its more deeply divided leaf shape and the color of its flower, which is yellow, not beige.

**How to grow**

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Diplotaxis</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring under protection at 65°F (18°C); germination takes five to ten days. For the best results, sow seeds in late spring when the air temperature at night does not fall below 45°F (7°C), into prepared open ground; germination takes two to three weeks. Thin plants to 8 in (20 cm) apart.

**SITE** This herb will grow anywhere, taking off like a “rocket”—hence its name. It has adapted to the poorest sites, growing in crevices and walls, but poor sites produce tough and bitter-tasting leaves. To produce a lush, tender leaf crop, grow rocket in light shade in a well-prepared, well-fed soil. It is not ideal as a container plant because it produces a long taproot.

**MAINTENANCE** For a good leaf crop, sow annually in spring. Later in the year, cover young plants with horticultural fleece to extend the picking season until the temperature falls below 30°F (-1°C). The following spring, dig up old plants and sow a new crop. This herb is prone to flea beetle attack. To prevent attack, you can cover the young crop with fleece from mid-spring on.

**HARVESTING** The leaves can be picked from early spring until the first hard frosts, for using fresh or for making pesto (see page 227). The flowers can be picked just as they open for adding to salads.

► *Diplotaxis muralis*  
WILD ROCKET, RUCOLA

Perennial, often grown as an annual. Height 12 in (30 cm) and spread 6 in (15 cm). Yellow four-petaled flowers appear in summer. The green, deeply divided, aromatic leaves form a rosette as the plant matures.

**How to use**

Rocket is a digestive stimulant and is high in sulfur, which is good for healthy skin, hair, and nails. The leaves are delicious in salads. Dress the leaves with salt, lemon, oil, and vinegar, or simply serve rocket leaves with a little fresh Parmesan cheese.



**Flower** is bright yellow with four petals. It has little scent

**Leaves** become more deeply divided and pungent as the plant matures

**Stem** is narrow and edible when young, adding crunch to a fresh green salad

*Echinacea***Echinacea** ASTERACEAE

This marvelous North American herb suggests that we should hold folk medicine in higher regard. For many years, Native Americans have known that echinacea increases resistance to infection, but only in the past decade has modern research confirmed these properties. Now demand for echinacea almost exceeds supply. *Echinacea angustifolia*, *E. pallida*, and *E. purpurea* all have similar medicinal properties, and are becoming increasingly rare in the wild due to over-collection; today, only cultivated herb plants grown by reputable sources should be purchased.

**How to grow**

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation |
|------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Echinacea</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In early spring, sow seeds into a container under cover at 65°F (18°C). If germination does not occur within 28 days, place outside for a further 21 days, then re-cover the container and place out of direct sunlight. Germination should then occur within a further 20 days. When the seedlings are large enough to handle, plant into a prepared site, 12 in (30 cm) apart. In winter, divide established plants while dormant, or take root cuttings in late winter or early spring. When the roots take, plant out into a prepared site in the garden.

**SITE** Plant in a sunny site in a rich, free-draining soil. Excessive wet causes roots to rot. (*E. purpurea* is not as sensitive to wet soils as other species.) *Echinacea* will grow well in a large container. Use a soil-based substrate and repot each winter.

**MAINTENANCE** After flowering, cut back the plant and collect the seeds. In spring, lightly mulch established plants with well-rotted manure. Spring growth in mature plants and young plants can attract snails. Check plants and remove snails on a daily basis.

**HARVESTING** Pick flowers and leaves during flowering before the seedheads (cones) are fully formed. When the petals are dead, pick the seedheads and dry. In the fall, harvest roots and rhizomes from four-year-old plants.

**How to use**

Echinacea raises the body's resistance to infection by stimulating the immune system. It is very effective in preventing colds and flu. A decoction of juice extracted from flowers can also be used to treat minor wounds, burns, and boils, and as a gargle for throat infections.



▲ ***Echinacea angustifolia***  
NARROW-LEAFED ECHINACEA,  
BLACK SAMPSON

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 24 in (60 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). It is an endangered species in its natural habitat.



▲ ***Echinacea pallida***  
ECHINACEA, CONEFLOWER

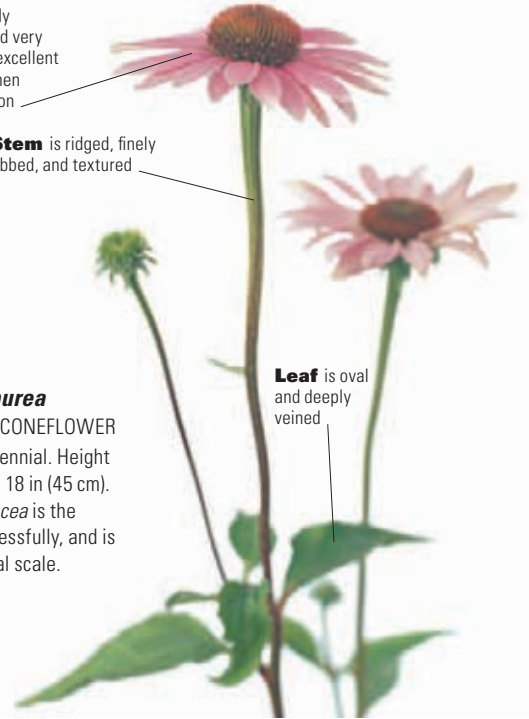
Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 33 in (80 cm) and spread 18 in (45 cm). *E. pallida* is not as medicinally effective as other species, but is a very attractive plant.

**Flower** is lightly honey-scented and very long lasting. It is excellent as a cut flower when grown in cultivation

**Stem** is ridged, finely ribbed, and textured

► ***Echinacea purpurea***  
ECHINACEA, PURPLE CONEFLOWER  
Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 4 ft (1.2 m) and spread 18 in (45 cm). This species of *Echinacea* is the simplest to grow successfully, and is grown on a commercial scale.

**Leaf** is oval and deeply veined



*Elettaria*

# Cardamom ZINGIBERACEAE

This tropical plant was originally found growing wild in the Ghat Mountains on the Malabar Coast of southwest India, in an area known as the Cardamom Hills. Today, it is cultivated for its lemon-flavored seeds in India, Sri Lanka, Guatemala, and Tanzania. Aromatic cardamom seeds are used to flavor sweet and savory foods, and drinks such as coffee and wine. In cool temperate climates, cardamom plants will grow successfully in a conservatory or greenhouse. They will not flower or produce seedpods in these conditions, but, in my opinion, their beautiful leaves more than make up for it.



**Pods** contain approximately 12–18 black seeds. The seeds have a warm, spicy, lemon flavor.

## How to grow

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation |
|------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Elettaria</i> | Sand | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** In late fall, sow fresh seeds under protection at 75°F (24°C). An additional light source may be needed to encourage germination, which takes 14–21 days. Seed-raised plants will take five years to flower. It is much easier to propagate plants by the division of rhizomes in spring. In warm climates, they will take three years to flower.

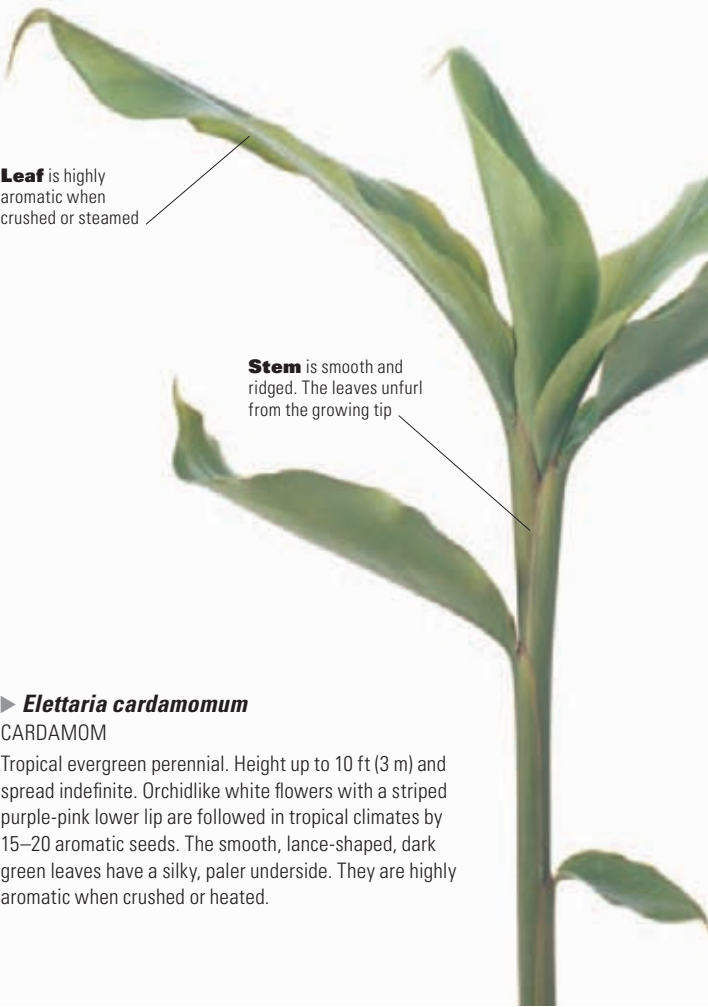
**SITE** Plant in rich, moist soil in partial shade, where temperatures do not fall below 50°F (10°C). It will produce flowers and fruit only under tropical conditions. In subtropical or cool regions, it is best grown as a foliage plant in a container using a loam-based substrate. Place in a warm conservatory or greenhouse in partial shade; full sun will make the leaves turn yellow.

**MAINTENANCE** In hot climates, cardamom can be invasive. In spring, dig up its creeping rhizomes to control it in the garden, and repot container-grown plants. Feed container-grown plants regularly from spring until early fall with liquid seaweed or comfrey.

**HARVESTING** In hot climates, seeds are harvested by hand, which makes them an expensive crop to produce. In cool climates, pick the leaves to use fresh as required.

## How to use

Seeds, extracted from the pod and chewed, freshen the breath and aid digestion. Some varieties have green and others brown pods. The bright green pods are best for culinary use. Use the leaves to add flavor to steamed fish, chicken, and vegetable dishes by lining the steamer with leaves.



**Leaf** is highly aromatic when crushed or steamed

**Stem** is smooth and ridged. The leaves unfurl from the growing tip

► *Elettaria cardamomum*  
CARDAMOM

Tropical evergreen perennial. Height up to 10 ft (3 m) and spread indefinite. Orchidlike white flowers with a striped purple-pink lower lip are followed in tropical climates by 15–20 aromatic seeds. The smooth, lance-shaped, dark green leaves have a silky, paler underside. They are highly aromatic when crushed or heated.



Eriocephalus

Wild rosemary ASTERACEAE

I have been growing this plant for more than ten years, but for a long time I was unaware of its herbal properties—I only knew that the leaves smelled lovely, and that, in winter, it produced attractive flowers followed by fascinating fluffy white seeds. When my neighbors gave me a medicinal plant book from South Africa, I discovered that this plant grew wild in the Western Cape, and that it was an important medicinal and culinary herb. Its colloquial name, “kapokbos,” derives from the Afrikaans word for snow, which is “kapok,” and refers to the appearance of the downy seeds.

How to grow

| Herb         | Soil | Propagation       |
|--------------|------|-------------------|
| Eriocephalus | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seeds in spring under protection at 68°F (20°C). Germination takes 10–15 days. In cool climates, place young plants in a frostfree environment over winter. In late spring, take softwood cuttings from the growing tips. In cool climates, grow the young plants under protection for the first year.

**SITE** This plant grows wild on granite and clay slopes and by the sea. In the garden, it prefers full sun and well-drained soil. In warm climates, it can be grown as a hedge or clipped into ball shapes. In temperatures below 45°F (8°C), it grows well as a container plant in a loam-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** Prune after flowering in late spring to encourage bushy growth. Protect from frosts and, more importantly, from damp, wet conditions.

**HARVESTING** Pick the leaves to use fresh, or to dry for later use, after flowering from spring until early fall. Pick aromatic branches as required, and harvest seeds when they become fluffy.

How to use

Wild rosemary has been used to treat coughs and colds, flatulence, and colic. It is also used as a diuretic. For relaxation, add an infusion of leaves to the bath. Make a foot bath of leaves to relieve swollen legs or to stimulate the onset of menstruation. An infusion of the leaves and twigs is used to control dandruff and to stimulate hair growth. In cooking, the leaves are used in meat dishes and vegetable stews. Dried leaves can be added to potpourri (see page 236).



▲ *Eriocephalus africanus*  
WILD ROSEMARY, SNOWBUSH,  
KAPOKBOS

Half-hardy evergreen shrub. Height and spread 3 ft (1 m). Clusters of small white flowers with magenta centers in winter. The small, silver-haired, slightly succulent leaves grow in tufts along the branch and reflect sunlight, which reduces leaf temperature.



**Seed** is covered in fluffy white hairs, which look like snow

*Eupatorium*

# Joe Pye weed

 ASTERACEAE

*Eupatorium* is native to North America, and can be found growing in low, moist ground, wooded slopes, savannas, and along streams. This herb is said to have taken its name from a Native American named Joe Pye, who reputedly used it to cure fevers and typhus. It is still considered an aphrodisiac by some Native American tribes, and today is used by modern herbalists to treat cystitis and other urinary conditions. In the garden it looks most attractive planted in drifts either at the back of a border, or around a pond, where it will attract masses of butterflies in late summer.

**CAUTION** This herb has liver-toxic and carcinogenic properties, and should only be administered by a professional.

## How to grow

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Eupatorium</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In the fall, sow fresh seeds in pots and place them in a cold frame. If no germination occurs within 28 days, place the container outside to expose it to all weathers, especially frost. After 21 days, move it back to the cold frame. After germination, keep seedlings in a cold frame over winter before planting out the following spring in a well-prepared site. Take root cuttings in spring. Divide established plants in fall and replant in a well-prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in moist, fertile soil in full sun or light shade. This plant is not ideal for growing in containers because it grows too big, too quickly.

**MAINTENANCE** In late spring, pinch back the stems to make a shorter, bushier plant. In the fall, prevent self-seeding by cutting back as soon as the seeds have set.

**HARVESTING** For use as a dye, cut the flowering stems in spring, just as the buds begin to open. In the fall, lift the roots for drying.

## How to use

Medicinally, the roots are the most potent part of the plant. As the common name "gravel root" indicates, it helps treat bladder stones (gravel) and urinary problems. An infusion of flowers makes a diuretic tea to alleviate fluid retention. A tea made from the fresh leaves is used to bring down high fevers, and to treat rheumatism. To make a fly repellent, crush dried leaves and burn them. The flowers and seeds yield a pink or red textile dye.

### ▼ *Eupatorium purpureum*

JOE PYE WEED, QUEEN OF THE MEADOW, GRAVEL ROOT, PURPLE BONESET

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 10 ft (3 m) and spread up to 3 ft (1 m). Fragrant pale pink to pale purple flowers in large, domed clusters appear in summer until early fall, followed by attractive seedheads. The leaves are oval, dark green, large, and finely toothed.



*Filipendula***Meadowsweet** ROSACEAE

When I first moved to my farm, I was brought a housewarming present of “meadowsweet” vinegar, which had been made from the flowers that grow wild along the lane. Traditionally, this herb was strewn on the floor with rushes to give the scent of sweet almonds to a room, but in the 19th century, meadowsweet’s reputation grew when salicylic acid was isolated from the stem sap. This was later synthesized as acetylsalicylic acid and forms the basis of what we know today as aspirin. Meadowsweet is not recommended for anyone who is sensitive to this analgesic.

**How to grow**

| Herb               | Soil | Propagation |
|--------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Filipendula</i> | Loam | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds into a container in early spring and place in a cold frame. Germination usually takes one to three months, but can be erratic. Divide established meadowsweet plants in early fall. Replant 12 in (30 cm) apart.

**SITE** Plant in moisture-retentive soil in sun or partial shade. Meadowsweet is a good plant for growing in clay soils, and close to or in water. It grows well in containers, in a soil-based substrate. Place the container in partial shade and do not let it dry out.

**MAINTENANCE** To encourage new leaf growth, cut back after flowering in late summer. Meadowsweet is prone to mildew. If this occurs, cut off the diseased leaves. If it is very serious, cut the plant down to the ground and destroy all the contaminated leaves.

**HARVESTING** Pick young leaves to use fresh or to dry before flowering. Harvest the flowers just as they open to use fresh or to dry. Dig up the roots of three-year-old plants to dry or use fresh.

**How to use**

Both the leaves and flowers are edible. The flowers have a mild almond flavor and can be added to stewed fruits, jellies, and jams. They are also good for flavoring mead and beer, and make an interesting wine. Young spring leaves have a dry flavor and can be added to salad or soups. The flowers make a good tea, which is ideal for those suffering from aches or pains. The roots of the plant make a black textile dye.

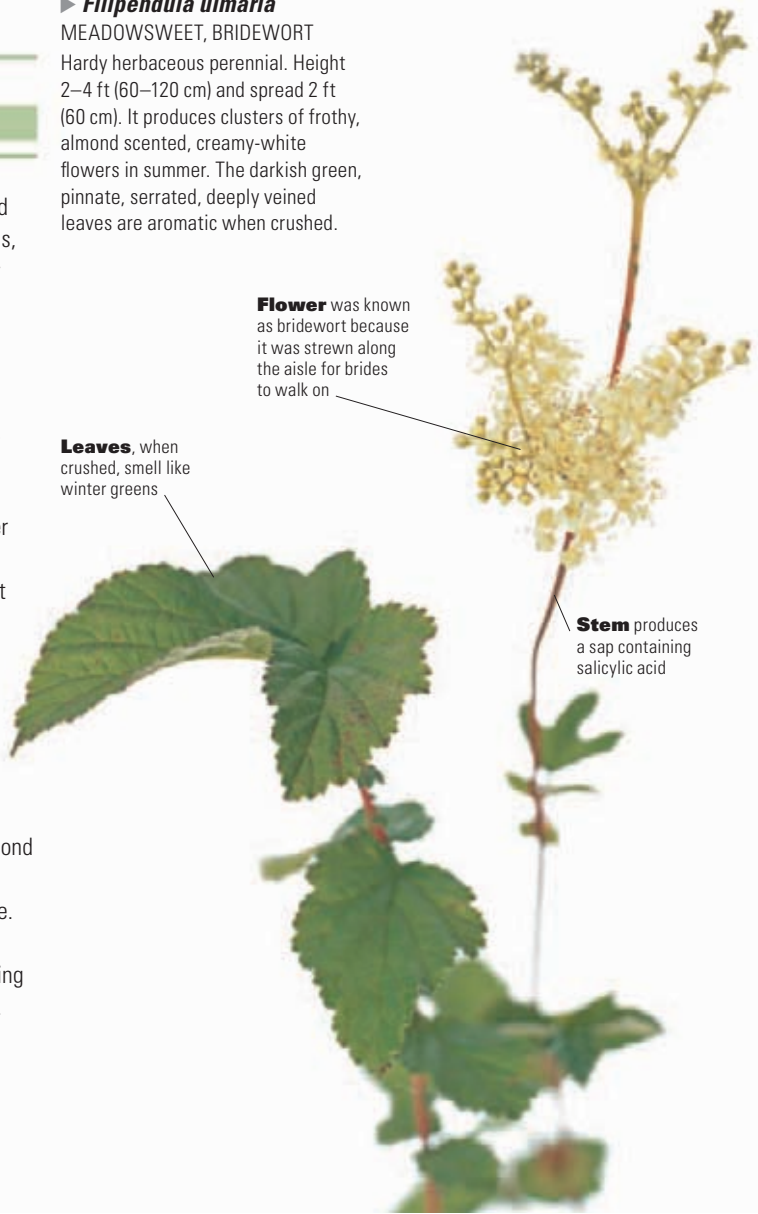
► ***Filipendula ulmaria*****MEADOWSWEET, BRIDEWORT**

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 2–4 ft (60–120 cm) and spread 2 ft (60 cm). It produces clusters of frothy, almond scented, creamy-white flowers in summer. The darkish green, pinnate, serrated, deeply veined leaves are aromatic when crushed.

**Flower** was known as bridewort because it was strewn along the aisle for brides to walk on

**Leaves**, when crushed, smell like winter greens

**Stem** produces a sap containing salicylic acid





*Foeniculum***Fennel** APIACEAE

This beautiful aromatic herb has been in cultivation for thousands of years. The Greeks ate fennel to suppress hunger, and in the Middle Ages it was used to deter insects. Today, nearly all parts of the fennel plant are used for culinary purposes: the leaves for salads, the fennel stems on barbecues to add flavor to meat and fish, and the seeds ground as spice for use with lamb, pork, and vegetables. Care should be taken, however, because, if taken in large doses, oil made from fennel seed can cause convulsions and disturb the nervous system.

**How to grow**

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Foeniculum</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination takes seven to ten days. Continue to grow under protection until all threat of frost has past. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground when the air temperature at night remains above 41°F (5°C), and germination takes 14–20 days. If you have light soil, divide established plants in spring.

**SITE** Plant in a warm, sunny site in well-drained, fertile soil. If grown in poor soil or arid conditions, fennel will taste bitter. Also, do not plant fennel near dill or coriander—the former may cross-pollinate with fennel, and the latter alters the flavor. Fennel grows well in containers in a loam-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** Harvest the seeds and then cut back the plant to promote new leaf growth. Replace fennel plants every three to four years to maintain a good flavor. In the fall, when the plant has died back, mulch the soil around the plant with well-rotted manure. In winter, protect the fennel plant from wet conditions because it is susceptible to mildew and/or rot.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves to use fresh in summer prior to flowering. Pick flowers to use fresh as they open. Harvest seeds just as they change color from green to brown, and dry well.

**How to use**

The seeds of the fennel plant have the best medicinal properties. An infusion of seeds eases flatulence and colic in young children and prevents heartburn and indigestion in adults. A mild infusion can be used as an eyewash.



**Seeds** are very aromatic. You can chew them to freshen your breath.

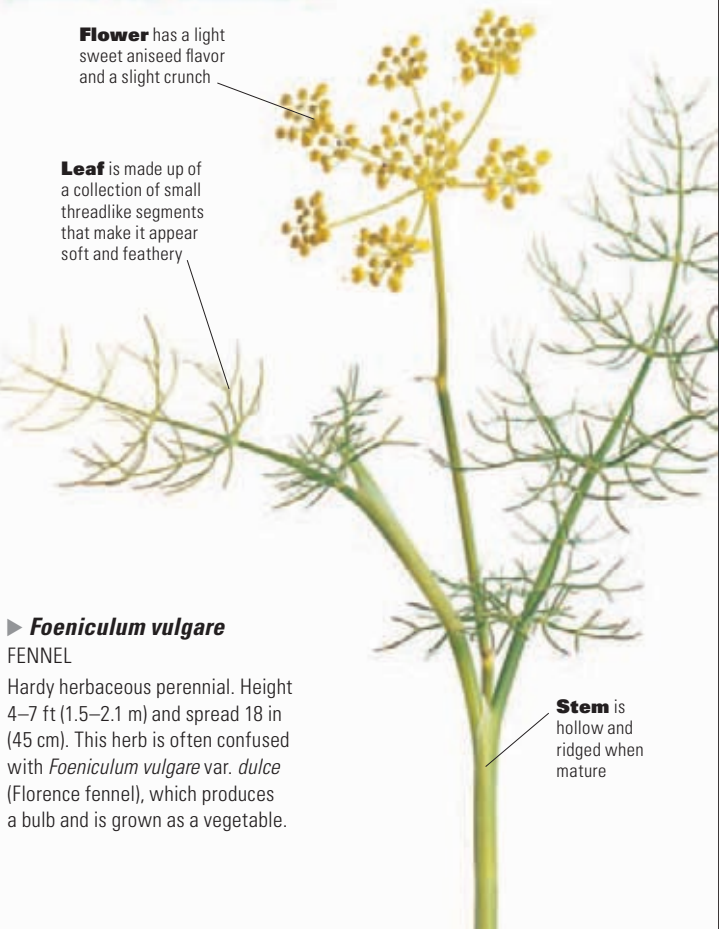


**Flower** has a light sweet aniseed flavor and a slight crunch

**Leaf** is made up of a collection of small threadlike segments that make it appear soft and feathery

◀ *Foeniculum vulgare*  
**'Purpureum'**  
BRONZE FENNEL

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 4–7 ft (1.5–2.1 m) and spread 18 in (45 cm). Large, flat umbels of small yellow flowers appear in summer, followed by aromatic seeds. This fennel looks striking in a mixed border as well as in the herb garden.



► *Foeniculum vulgare*  
FENNEL

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 4–7 ft (1.5–2.1 m) and spread 18 in (45 cm). This herb is often confused with *Foeniculum vulgare* var. *dulce* (Florence fennel), which produces a bulb and is grown as a vegetable.

**Stem** is hollow and ridged when mature

*Fragaria*

# Wild strawberry ROSACEAE

This herb grows in the cool temperate climates of Europe, northern Asia, Australia, and North America. For me, picking wild strawberries on walks in the forest, bringing them home carefully, and then eating them the following morning with my cereal is a vivid childhood memory. The strawberry fruit was dedicated by the ancient Romans to Venus and in medieval times to the Virgin Mary—possibly because of its medicinal properties as a diuretic and an astringent, or maybe just because it is so heavenly to eat. Some people, however, are allergic to strawberries.



**Fruit** is edible, small, and scarlet, and smells and tastes sweet.

## How to grow

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Fragaria</i> | Loam | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** In late summer, pick fresh fruit and leave to dry on cheesecloth. Rub the seeds off the dried fruit and sow fresh in early fall, on the surface of the substrate. Place in a cold frame, but do not cover. Germination takes six to ten weeks. Alternatively, sow in spring on the surface; do not cover. Place under protection at 68°F (20°C). As soon as the seeds have germinated, remove them from heat and grow on under protection at 60°F (15°C). Plant out when they are large enough to handle and there is no chance of frost. Established plants produce runners, each of which has a small root system; plant out where required in a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in sun or partial shade in fertile soil that does not dry out in summer. This herb is good ground cover and grows well in containers in a soil- or loam-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** Feed regularly with liquid comfrey fertilizer throughout the fruiting season. Cut back runners if the plant becomes too invasive. As insurance against an extreme winter, pot a few runners in the fall.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves to use fresh or to dry in late spring before the fruit sets. Pick ripe fruit from summer until early fall. Harvest the fruit to dry for seed collecting in early summer.

## How to use

Medicinally, the leaves are mildly astringent and can be made into a gargle for sore throats. The fruit is a diuretic. They are a useful addition to the diet for those suffering from rheumatic gout. The fresh fruit can help remove tooth discoloration.



**Flower** has five white petals, and a yellow center and stamen

**Leaves** have a musky scent and flavor

### ► *Fragaria vesca* WILD STRAWBERRY

Hardy perennial. Height 6–12 in (15–30 cm) and spread 7 in (18 cm), or indefinite if you include the runners. Flowers with yellow centers followed by small, scarlet, sweet fruit appear throughout the summer. The leaves taste good mixed with other herbs in a salad or as a tea.

*Galega*

# Goat's rue

PAPILIONACEAE

Indigenous to central and southern Europe and western Asia, this herb has naturalized across Europe and in New Zealand, as well as in western Pakistan, where it is the host for the caterpillar of many forms of the *Coleophora vicinella* moth. It has also spread to the USA, where it has been classed as a noxious weed. It has been used for hundreds of years to treat plagues and infections, and was historically recommended as a cure for snake bites. The name “galega” comes from the Greek word gala, meaning “milk,” because of its reputation for increasing lactation in nursing mothers and animals.

**CAUTION** Only to be used under professional supervision when treating diabetes.

## How to grow

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation   |
|---------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Galega</i> | Soil | Seed/division |

**PROPAGATION** In early spring, sow seeds into prepared seed or plug module trays; germination takes 10–20 days without extra heat. Alternatively, in mid-spring, sow directly into a prepared site in the garden, thinning to 30 in (75 cm) apart. Divide established plants in the second or third year either by using two forks, back-to-back, or by digging up the whole plant. Once divided, replant in a well-prepared site.

**SITE** This fully hardy herb will grow in most soils. It prefers a deep soil that does not dry out in summer and allows the roots to become well established. If the plant becomes invasive or outgrows its position, cut it back hard; this will keep it under control and encourage flowering at a lower height, which can look very effective.

**MAINTENANCE** This can be a sprawling plant, so cut back hard in early summer to keep it under control and maximize the flowers, and again after the first flowering to promote a second flush.

**HARVESTING** All the aerial parts of the plant are harvested in summer just before flowering, then dried for medicinal use.

## How to use

Used medicinally, goat's rue reduce blood sugar levels and is a useful diuretic, and is also used to increase lactation in nursing mothers. The leaves and stem are used as an animal food supplement to increase milk yield. Goat's rue can also be grown as a green manure, and it is an excellent bee plant.



▲ *Galega officinalis*  
GOAT'S RUE, FRENCH LILAC  
Hardy, herbaceous perennial. Height 3–5 ft (1–1.5 m) and spread up to 3 ft (1 m). Attractive clusters of white or mauve flowers in summer are followed by long seed pods. Its leaflets are green, compound, divided, and lance-shaped.



*Galium*

# Sweet woodruff

RUBIACEAE

Formerly known as *Asperula odorata*, this herb is a native of Europe and was introduced into North America and Asia, where it became naturalized. Sweet woodruff is ideal for ground cover, under deciduous trees, and by hedges or on banks, and is one of the few herbs to grow well in dappled shade. It has a pretty, star-shaped flower and attractive foliage. The leaves can be picked in early spring, dried, and used like lavender to scent fresh laundry—their scent is reminiscent of freshly mown hay with a hint of vanilla. Historically, the dried leaves were used a stuffing for beds.

## How to grow

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation   |
|---------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Galium</i> | Loam | Root cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** This plant readily self-seeds in the wild, but in controlled conditions it may be a challenge to grow from seed. In the fall, sow fresh seeds in a pot and cover with coarse horticultural sand. Place outside. Germination takes one to six months. Alternatively, it may be easier to propagate established plants by division or take root cuttings in spring (see pages 52–53). Once divided or rooted, plant in a prepared site 12 in (30 cm) apart.

**SITE** Plant in a moist, fertile soil in partial shade. (Sweet woodruff will adapt to most soils, but will need extra water in hot or dry conditions.) It can be mildly invasive if grown in its optimum conditions. It will adapt to containers, but allow enough room for seasonal growth or the roots may rot in wet conditions.

**MAINTENANCE** In hot, dry conditions, this herb may suffer from seasonal dieback, causing the leaves to turn yellow. Cut it back, and it will revive with watering and the cooler temperatures of late summer. If the plant becomes invasive, dig it up before the flowers have set.

**HARVESTING** Pick the leaves and flowers together in early spring. Its scent of freshly mown hay is strongest after the plant has been dried.

## How to use

Fresh leaves are used as flavoring agents in nonalcoholic and alcoholic drinks. Dried leaves are placed between clothes, towels, and sheets used as a fabric freshener. As a medicinal plant, woodruff has been used as an antispasmodic and a diuretic.

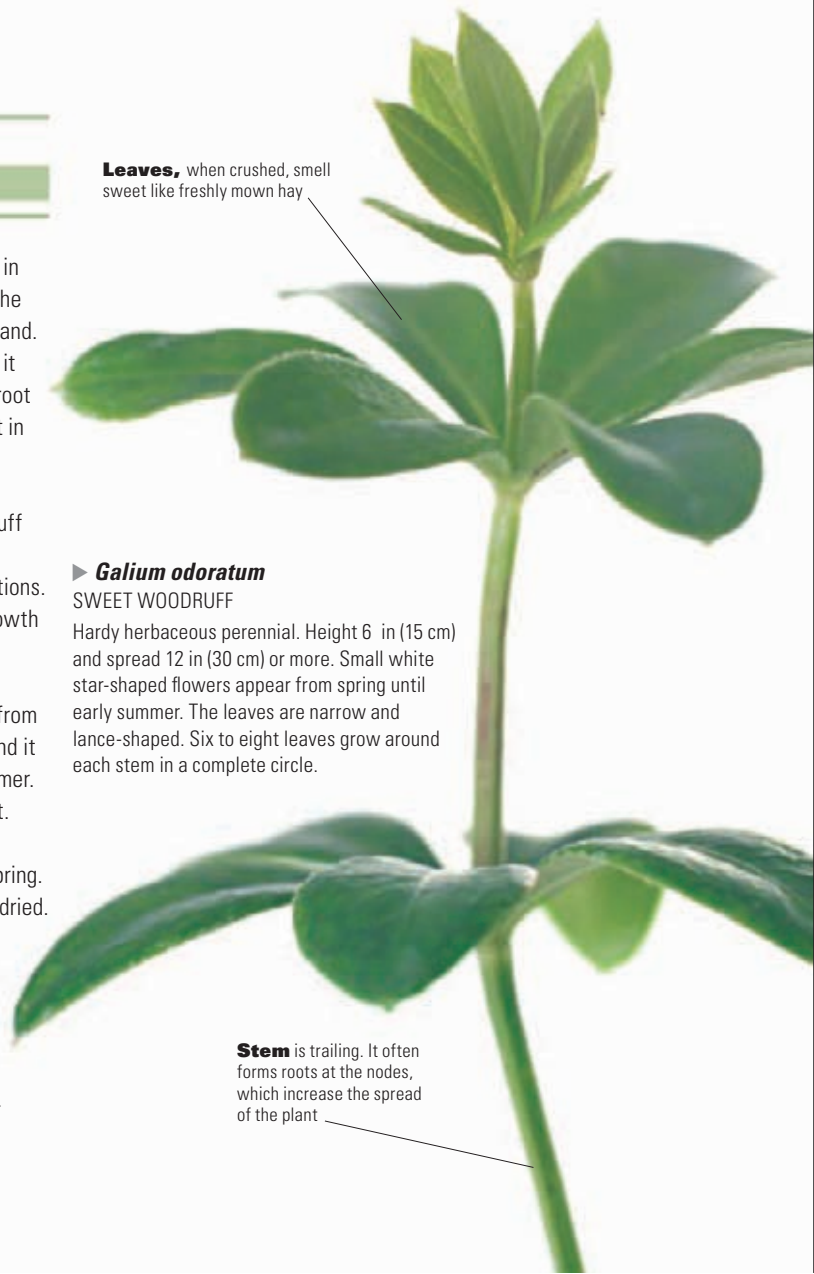
**Leaves**, when crushed, smell sweet like freshly mown hay

### ► *Galium odoratum*

#### SWEET WOODRUFF

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 6 in (15 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm) or more. Small white star-shaped flowers appear from spring until early summer. The leaves are narrow and lance-shaped. Six to eight leaves grow around each stem in a complete circle.

**Stem** is trailing. It often forms roots at the nodes, which increase the spread of the plant



*Ginkgo*

**Ginkgo** GINKGOACEAE

This fascinating tree is thought to be one of the most ancient trees on the planet; it is regarded as the ancestor of all conifers, and is one of the most well-researched herbs in the world. In Chinese medicine, it is regarded as the herb for the elderly because of its powerful effects on the circulatory system. The nuts are used to treat asthma, bronchial congestion, and coughs. The name “ginkgo” is derived from the Japanese word *ginkyo* meaning “silver apricot,” which refers to the fruit. “Biloba” translates as “two-lobed,” referring to the split in the middle of the fan-shaped leaves.

**CAUTION** If taken in excess, ginkgo can cause a toxic reaction.

**How to grow**

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Ginkgo</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In the fall, remove the pith from around the seed and wash in mild detergent to remove the protective coating around the seed. Sow one seed per pot. Cover with coarse grit and place in a cold frame. Germination takes four to six months or longer. Grow on in a pot for a further five years before planting out. Take cuttings from new growth in summer. When rooted, grow on as a container plant for at least five years before planting in the final growing position. Fruits will only be produced in a warm climate when a male and female tree are planted near one another.

**SITE** Plant in full sun to partial sun in light, fertile, deep soil. It is adaptable and tolerates air pollution. Young specimens grow well in containers in a loam-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** Little maintenance is needed for trees in the open ground. If growing as a container plant, remove the leaves from around the plant after they drop in the fall. Repot each spring.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves as they turn from green to yellow in the fall, and dry. The small plums are picked when ripe. The kernel (nut) is extracted and dried in the fall.

**How to use**

The nuts are a culinary delicacy, and should be cooked before eating. They can be roasted or used in soups and stir fries, and are often served at wedding feasts. They are available in Eastern supermarkets, where they are often called “white nuts.” Medicinally, an infusion of the leaves is used to improve the memory and the circulation, and to ease tinnitus. The leaves are being researched as a treatment for Alzheimer’s.



**Leaf** blade is sometimes whole, but often has a characteristic slit in the center. The veins are slightly raised

▲ *Ginkgo biloba*  
GINKGO, MAIDENHAIR TREE

Hardy deciduous tree. Height 130 ft (40 m), spread 70 ft (20 m). It is dioecious, which means it bears male and female flowers on different trees in early summer. The flowers are followed by small fruit on the female tree. The leaves are fan-shaped.

*Glycyrrhiza*

**Licorice** PAPILIONACEAE

One of the most popular and widely-consumed herbs in the world, licorice is native to southern Europe, Asia, and the Mediterranean, and is commercially cultivated in Russia, Spain, Iran, and India. It has been used medicinally for over 3,000 years. The ancient Egyptians and Greeks recognized its benefits in treating coughs and lung disease. It was introduced into Britain in the 16th century, but is now no longer grown as a commercial crop. I used to eat licorice whips as a child and just loved the flavor; I still find it a fascinating old herb today.



**Root** is dried before use as a flavoring for a confection (known as licorice sticks) or as a medicine.

**How to grow**

| Herb               | Soil | Propagation |
|--------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Glycyrrhiza</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**CAUTION** Do not take licorice medicinally if pregnant, or if suffering from kidney disease.

**PROPAGATION** Seeds collected in cool climates tend not to be viable. Sow seeds in spring under protection at 68°F (20°C). Germination takes 10–14 days, but can be erratic. Grow on for two years in a container before planting out in the open ground. Divide established plants in the fall after the plant has died back. Make sure there is a growing bud visible in each division, and replant into a well-prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in fertile, deep, well-cultivated soil in a sunny position. Plant pot-grown plants or divided roots, at a depth of 6 in (15 cm), and place 3 ft (1 m) apart. Licorice is not well suited to growing in containers unless they are very deep, such as a trash can.

**MAINTENANCE** To produce a good crop of roots, mulch the soil in the fall with well-rotted manure. In spring, cut back old leaf growth.

**HARVESTING** In early winter, dig up the roots of established three- or four-year-old plants for drying. Since this plant is slow-growing, dig up one-third of the root at this time and leave the rest to harvest in subsequent years. Fill in with well-rotted manure to encourage more root growth.

**How to use**

Licorice root is used to flavor black treacle and Guinness beer. Medicinally, it is one of the most prescribed herbs in China. It is used to treat the spleen, liver, and kidneys. The Japanese use a licorice preparation to treat hepatitis. In western medicine, it is used to alleviate sore throats, coughs, and bronchitis.

► *Glycyrrhiza glabra*  
LICORICE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 4 ft (1.2 m) and spread 3 ft (1 m). Short spikes of pealike white flowers tinged with mauve-purple appear in late summer followed by long pods. The large green leaves are divided into oval leaflets.

**Leaf** is composed of between 9 and 17 oval leaflets





*Hesperis matronalis*

# Sweet rocket

BRASSICACEAE

The scent of this herb, as it wafts on the warm evening air, is of violets with a hint of warm cloves. This evening-scented plant's name, *Hesperis*, is the Greek word for "evening." In the language of flowers it is said to represent deceit, since it gives out a lovely perfume in the evening but none in the day. It has naturalized in Europe, where it hosts caterpillars from several different butterfly species including the Orange Tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*) and Small White (*Pieris rapae*). Unfortunately, sweet rocket has been classed as a weed in some US states because of its ability to self-seed.

## How to grow

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation   |
|-----------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Hesperis</i> | Loam | Seed/division |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seed in the fall in prepared seed or plug trays. Winter the young plants in a cold greenhouse. By sowing early, you can sometimes have plants flowering in the first season. Alternatively, sow direct into the garden in early summer. Thin after germination to 12 in (30 cm) apart and, when well established, to the final planting distance of 18 in (45 cm). Divide established plants in late spring (see page 53) either by using two forks back-to-back, or by hand. Replant into a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in full sun or light shade, in a well-drained fertile soil, in the middle or toward the back of the border. This herb looks most attractive when planted in large clumps, rather than as single plants. A word of warning: sweet rocket can be invasive in light soils.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back hard in midsummer, after flowering, to promote a second flowering flush. This will also prevent the plants from sprawling over the garden and self-seeding.

**HARVESTING** Pick young leaves before the plant flowers in early summer. Pick the flowers throughout the summer—preferably in the morning, just as they open.

## How to use

The young leaves have a bitter flavour and can be added to salads; they work well with potatoes and pasta. The flowers are edible, and can be added to fruit and savory salads; they also crystallize well, making an attractive garnish for cakes and puddings. Sweet rocket is a member of the mustard family, and therefore produces a prolific amount of seed in the fall, which provides a good source of food for wild birds.



▲ *Hesperis matronalis*  
SWEET ROCKET, DAME'S ROCKET, DAMASK VIOLET,  
DAME'S VIOLET, DAME'S-WORT, MOTHER-OF-THE-EVENING  
A short-lived hardy perennial, with a height of 2–3 ft (60–90 cm). It produces sweetly scented, mauve, white, pink, or purple flowers in the summer of the second year, and has green, lance-shaped leaves.

Humulus

Hop CANNABACEAE

This herb is native to the northern temperate zones, and is now cultivated commercially in northern Europe and North America. It was originally eaten as a vegetable—the young shoots are similar in taste to asparagus. In the reign of Henry VIII, hops revolutionized the brewing of beer in Britain, replacing traditional bitter herbs such as alecost (*Tanacetum balsamita*) and helping preserve the beer. Hops have been used medicinally for hundreds of years as a sedative; a pillow stuffed with dried hops cured George III’s insomnia, and hop pillows are still used today.

How to grow

| Herb    | Soil | Propagation       |
|---------|------|-------------------|
| Humulus | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Obtain seeds from a specialized supplier to avoid hop wilt disease. Sow in the fall and cover with horticultural sand and coarse grit. Place the container outside. Germination usually takes four to six months, but may take up to one season. Take softwood cuttings from female plants in spring or early summer—it is difficult to identify the gender of plants grown from seed until they are two to three years old (see *Humulus lupulus*, below right). Divide root stems of established plants in spring. Replant 3ft (1m) apart in well-prepared soil, and support.

**SITE** Plant in a sunny position in a soil that is rich in leafmold and has been deeply dug. Grow hops in containers in a soil-based substrate. Provide support for the plants to climb, or let them cascade over the edge.

**MAINTENANCE** In the fall, cut back the plant to the ground, clear away any leaf or stem debris, and feed with well-rotted manure or compost. Hops are prone to hop wilt, which is very contagious—dig up affected plants and burn them, and do not plant hops in that area again. Leaf miner and powdery mildew are also problems for hops—remove infected leaves and burn them.

**HARVESTING** In spring, pick young sideshoots to use fresh. Harvest hop flowers in early fall. Dry well, and use quickly—the flavor fades rapidly.

How to use

Medicinally, the female flower is good for insomnia and intestinal cramps. A pillow stuffed with female flowers aids sleep. To eat, steam or lightly boil sideshoots, and parboil the male flowers to eat in salads. Blanch young leaves to remove bitterness, and use in soups and salads.



▲ *Humulus lupulus*  
COMMON HOP

Hardy herbaceous perennial vine. Height up to 20 ft (9 m). It is dioecious, with male and female flowers growing on separate plants in summer. The female flower is conelike and hidden by papery scales; the male flower, in clusters without sepals. The leaves have three to five lobes with sharply toothed edges.

*Hypericum***St. John's Wort** CLUSIACEAE

I love the fascinating stories associated with this herb. According to the old saying, whoever treads on St. John's Wort after sunset will be swept up on the back of a magic horse! In a more practical vein, however, it has many medicinal properties. Today, it is used in the treatment of neuralgia and varicose veins, and is famous as "nature's Prozac" in the treatment of depression. However, it should not be taken by people who are chronically depressed. It is a lovely herb to grow, with stunning yellow flowers in midsummer, which are followed by prolific seedheads.

**CAUTION** High doses may cause photosensitivity. Do not mix with other drugs. Always check with your doctor or herbalist before using. It can poison livestock.

**How to grow**

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation |
|------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Hypericum</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In spring, mix the very fine seeds with sand or flour for even sowing. Do not cover. Place under protection at 68°F (20°C) or in a cold frame. Germination takes 10–20 days with warmth; 15–30 days in a cold frame. Divide established plants in early fall, replanting 12 in (30 cm) apart in a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in a sunny position in well-drained chalky soil, although it will adapt to partial shade and all but waterlogged soils. If grown in a light soil it may become invasive. It will grow well in a container with a soil-based substrate. Please note that in some countries, notably Australia, this herb is subject to statutory control as a weed.

**MAINTENANCE** After flowering and harvest, cut the plant down to the ground to allow the green growth to form a semi-evergreen mat in winter.

**HARVESTING** Harvest the leaves for drying any time from early spring onward, and before the plant begins to send up flowering spikes. Harvest the flowers in summer, on a dry morning, as they open. Remove all green parts from the flower, then dry or preserve in wheatgerm or olive oil.

► ***Hypericum perforatum*****ST. JOHN'S WORT**

Hardy, semi-evergreen perennial. Height 12–36 in (30–90 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Lightly scented yellow flowers with tiny black gland dots appear in summer. The small green leaves are covered with tiny translucent spots, which are resin glands. When crushed or on a hot day, they give off an unpleasant foxy scent.

**How to use**

This important medicinal herb acts as tonic for the nervous system and as an antidepressant. An oil infused with the flowers stimulates tissue repair and is used to treat wounds, burns, and shingles. It is also good for sciatic pain, sunburn, ulcers, and varicose veins. It is used in homeopathy for pain and inflammation caused by nerve damage.

**Flower** has bright yellow petals that contain hypericin, a red pigment that is the active ingredient

**Stem** exudes a blood-red juice

**Leaves** are oval and stalkless





*Hyssopus***Hyssop** LAMIACEAE

This delightful Mediterranean herb not only looks lovely in the garden, but is also a great culinary and medicinal herb. It was used by the Greek physician Hippocrates (460–377 bc), who recommended it for chest complaints, for which it is still used today. It was also one of the herbs taken to the New World by the colonists, for its many uses as an antiseptic, in tea, and in herbal tobacco. The wonderful blue flowers, which have a sweet anise/minty flavor, are great for attracting many pollinating insects into the garden.

**CAUTION** Hyssop essential oil can cause epileptic fits. Hyssop should not be taken medicinally during pregnancy.

**How to grow**

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Hyssopus</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In spring, sow seeds under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination takes five to ten days. Take softwood cuttings in early summer from nonflowering shoots. In early fall, divide only established plants that are less than three years old. Dig up and gently pull the plant apart to obtain pieces of stem with both roots and leaf attached. Replant into a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in a sunny position in well-drained neutral-to-alkaline soil—good drainage is essential to the health of this plant. Hyssop makes a very pretty short-term hedge. It grows well in containers using a loam-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** A short-lived perennial, hyssop lasts for four to five years. In mild areas, cut back to 8 in (20 cm) in early fall, or wait until after spring frosts in cold areas.

**HARVESTING** Pick young, fresh leaves throughout the growing season. Harvest hyssop leaves for drying from nonflowering stems in summer. Pick the flowers just as they open. The flowers' scent is more intense when they are dried.

**How to use**

Hyssop is a good companion plant; when planted near cabbages, it lures away the cabbage white butterfly. Planted near grapevines, it attracts bees and increases pollination. In the kitchen, the leaves have a bitter, minty flavor, great to use in marinades and dressings, and the flowers are delicious in green salads. Medicinally, an infusion made from the leaves helps relieve bronchial congestion and eases coughs. It is also used as a tonic for the digestive and nervous systems.



◀ *Hyssopus officinalis*  
**'Roseus'**

PINK HYSSOP

Hardy semi-evergreen perennial. Height 32 in (80 cm) and spread 36 in (90 cm). Dense spikes of small, pale sugar-pink flowers appear from summer until early fall. It has small, narrow, lance-shaped, aromatic green leaves.



▲ *Hyssopus officinalis*

BLUE HYSSOP

Hardy semi-evergreen perennial. Height 32 in (80 cm) and spread 36 in (90 cm). Dense spikes of small dark blue-violet flowers appear from summer until early in the fall. The small lance-shaped leaves have a slightly bitter but minty and sagelike flavor.

*Inula*

# Elecampane

ASTERACEAE

This is a magical herb and a must if you have space in the garden. I love the sunflowerlike flowers in summer, followed by attractive seedheads that, in late fall, are a good food source for finches. Historically, Helen of Troy was believed to be gathering this herb when she was whisked off by Paris. The Romans used to candy the roots and dye them red with cochineal; this was a favorite delicacy of the Emperor Julius Augustus. In Tudor times, candy made from elecampane was used for coughs and chest complaints, which is still its main medicinal use today.

## How to grow

| Herb         | Soil | Propagation |
|--------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Inula</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In spring, sow seeds and place under protection at 68°F (20°C) or in a cold frame. Germination takes one to three weeks with heat, or three to four weeks cold. The cold method can give better results with home-collected seeds, although both can be erratic. In the fall, when established plants have died back, propagate by division. It may be easier to remove the offshoots that grow around the parent plant because the main root can be tough. Remove carefully, maintaining the root system. Replant in a well-prepared site 3 ft (1 m) apart or pot and plant out in spring.

**SITE** Plant in moist, fertile soil in full sun. Since it grows so tall, it is not ideal for planting in containers.

**MAINTENANCE** In windy or exposed sites, the flowers may need staking. In hot, dry summers, the plant will need extra water. In the fall, after the plant has died back, mulch with well-rotted compost or leafmold.

**HARVESTING** Pick flowers when fully open and dry for medicinal use, or pick just before the seeds turn brown for use in dried flower displays (if you do this later, the seeds will float everywhere). Dig up roots of two- or three-year-old plants in the fall to be used fresh in cooking or dried for medicinal use.

### ► *Inula helenium*

ELECAMPANE, ELFWORT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 5–8 ft (1.5–2.4 m), spread 3 ft (1 m). Large, bright yellow, ragged daisylike flowers appear in summer.

## How to use

Elecampane roots were once used to flavor desserts. The flowers are used in decoctions, the roots to make syrups, powders, and tinctures for treating chest complaints. Recent research has shown that elecampane is effective against bacterial and fungal infections, and can expel intestinal parasites. It is also said to make a good facial wash for the complexion.



**Flower** is a large ragged yellow daisy, about 3 in (7 cm) in diameter when fully open

**Stem** is fibrous and covered in a fine down

*Isatis*

# Woad LAMIACEAE

I fell in love with woad when I first grew it with my children for a school project. It is renowned as an ancient blue dye plant and is undergoing a huge revival because of the growing interest in natural plant pigments. The desirable blue coloring comes from the leaves, which are soaked in urine prior to use. It is now a popular plant with gardeners, not only for its rich, wafting, honey scent in early summer, but also for the clouds of attractive yellow flowers that seem to hover above the garden. The leaves of this herb are currently under medicinal research as a preventive against cancer.



**Root** is known as “ban lang gen” in Chinese medicine, and is used to treat mumps and sore throats.

## How to grow

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Isatis</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In the fall, sow seeds in pots and place in a cold frame. Germination takes three to four weeks. Or sow seeds in late spring directly into a well-prepared site at 12 in (30 cm) intervals.

**SITE** Plant in a sunny position in well-drained, well-fed soil. Woad grows wild on chalky wasteland, but will adapt to any soil. It is not an ideal container plant; it looks dull for the first year and then grows too tall in the second.

**MAINTENANCE** To increase leaf production and extend the life of the plant over another season, cut off the flowering stems as soon as they appear. Collect seeds before they fall; it does not naturally self-seed very well.

**HARVESTING** In late summer, pick the leaves of the first year’s growth to dry for medicinal use or for dyeing. The dye is extracted by a process of fermentation in water and urine from fresh or dry leaves. In the fall, dig up the roots of the second year’s growth and dry them. Harvest the seeds as they turn dark brown; dry well.

## How to use

It is difficult to grow sufficient quantities for dyeing purposes. In Chinese medicine, they extract “qing dai” from the leaf pigment and prescribe large doses with apparently no ill effects, even though it is highly astringent and poisonous. The Chinese also use the root to treat sore throats, mumps, and meningitis. Woad is classed as a noxious weed in the USA and Australia.

**CAUTION** Do not take internally unless under supervision.

**Flower bud cluster** turns into a four-petaled flower with a sweet honey perfume

**Stem** grows in the second year

► ***Isatis tinctoria***  
WOAD, DYER’S WOAD

Hardy biennial. Height in the first year 18 in (45 cm), growing to 4 ft (1.3 m) in the second, spread 18 in (45 cm). Clusters of numerous small, bright yellow flowers in the second summer, followed by pendulous black seeds. Lance-shaped, lightly toothed, blue-green leaves.

**Leaves** in the second season grow more lance-shaped and blue-green in color





*Juniperus*

# Juniper CUPRESSACEAE

This attractive conifer can be found in many different forms growing throughout the world; from the Arctic to the Mediterranean, and from the West Himalayas to North America. This plant was first used medicinally by the Ancient Greeks, who used it to cure snakebite and protect against infectious diseases. During the bubonic plague, it was burned in the hearth to guard against evil spirits and to fumigate homes, and it was used to disinfect hospital wards during World War Two. The berries are famous for giving gin its distinctive flavor.



**Berries** turn from green to blue to black as they ripen over a period of three years.

## How to grow

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation       |
|------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Juniperus</i> | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** This is not the easiest tree to grow from seed and requires patience. In early fall, collect ripe berries and remove the seed from the pith (see page 71). Use a loam-based substrate and cover with coarse grit. Place the pot outside. Germination can take two to five years. Do not allow the seed to dry out during the summer. Alternatively, take semi-hardwood cuttings from the fresh new growth in spring. With both methods, grow on for two years in a container before planting out into a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in a sunny position in alkaline or neutral soil. This slow-growing plant looks attractive when grown in a container. Use a soil-based substrate. Juniper plants actually like being pot-bound, so do not pot on too often.

**MAINTENANCE** To maintain the plant shape, trim and remove any leader shoots growing out of line in late spring or early summer. Do not cut back into old growth.

**HARVESTING** Both male and female plants are necessary to produce berries. The berries grow on the female bush. The best flavor is from those berries grown in warm climates. Pick berries in late summer and dry them on cheesecloth (see page 71).

## How to use

The flavor of the crushed berries is warm and spicy, and combines well with strong-flavored meats and marinades. Medicinally, juniper is used internally to treat cystitis, kidney inflammation, and rheumatism. Juniper oil, which is distilled from the berries, is used in fragrances and aromatherapy oils. It also makes a good massage oil to treat aching joints and muscles.

**Leaf** is aromatic and needlelike

**Stem** is woody

### ► *Juniperus communis*

#### JUNIPER

Hardy evergreen conifer. Height 20 ft (6 m) and spread 10 ft (3 m). It is dioecious, bearing small male (yellow) and female (green) flowers on different trees in early summer. Berries form on the female tree.



Laurus

# Bay

LAURACEAE

To the Greeks and Romans, bay was a symbol of wisdom and glory, and wreaths of laurel were once used to adorn the heads and necks of victorious athletes and leaders. A full-grown bay tree certainly has a regal shape in the garden. I love cooking with the fresh leaves, and find bay a versatile herb that goes well with main dishes as well as milk and rice puddings. However, do not take the essential oil made from the berries or leaves internally. In addition, an allergic reaction can occur in some people when this oil is used externally.

## How to grow

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Laurus</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Before sowing seeds in the fall, they need to be scarified (see page 45). Then place in a pot, cover with coarse horticultural sand, and keep under protection at 68°F (20°C) for one month before moving to an area with a minimum temperature at night of 55°F (13°C). Germination takes five to twelve months. Grow on in the pot for two to three years before planting out. Take cuttings from new growth in late summer. High humidity is essential for successful propagation, which takes three weeks to six months. Alternatively, propagate by division in spring or fall.

**SITE** In hot, dry climates, plant in well-drained soil in partial shade. In cool climates, with temperatures at night above 23°F (-5°C), plant in a sheltered, sunny position in well-drained soil. In cold climates, grow in a container with a soil-based substrate. Bay trees prefer to be pot bound. Protect in winter.

**MAINTENANCE** In cold climates, prune into shape in spring, but in warm climates, prune in the fall. Check leaves regularly for sooty mold, caused by the scale insect. To treat sooty mold, wash the leaves with horticultural soap or rub with cotton swabs dipped in brandy.

**HARVESTING** Since this is an evergreen herb, the leaf can be picked for use fresh all year round. Pick the berries in the fall.

## How to use

Bay leaves in cooking promote digestion, especially of meat. You can use the leaves fresh or dried (I prefer fresh). They are an ingredient in a bouquet garni (see page 229). A bay leaf placed in a jar of flour or rice will deter weevils.



▲ *Laurus nobilis* 'Aurea' AGM  
GOLDEN BAY

Perennial evergreen tree. Height up to 18 ft (5 m) and spread 6 ft (2 m). It needs shelter from the wind, frosts, and sun to prevent leaf scorch.



▲ *Laurus nobilis* f. *angustifolia*  
WILLOW LEAF BAY

Perennial evergreen tree. Height up to 23 ft (7 m) and spread 8 ft (2.5 m). This is a hardier variety than *L. nobilis* 'Aurea.'

**Leaf** becomes translucent when held to the light, showing all its veins

**Flower** is waxy in appearance, with very little scent

► *Laurus nobilis*  
BAY, SWEET BAY

Perennial evergreen tree. Height up to 26 ft (8 m) and spread 12 ft (3 m). Small, pale yellow flowers appear in spring, followed by berries that are black when ripe. When crushed, the leaves give off an aromatic scent.



**Stem** as it matures becomes woody

*Lavandula***Hardy lavender** LAMIACEAE

For many people, this is the quintessential herb: it smells good, looks good, and does you good. It was first taken to Britain by the Romans, who used it in their bathwater for its scent, to promote the healing of cuts and wounds, and as a flea and lice repellent. In France, hardy lavenders have been grown since the 17th century for their essential oil, which was, and still is, used in the perfume industry. Lavender's soothing and calming properties are well known. A tea made from lavender flowers can help you sleep, as can a bath with a few drops of essential oil.

**How to grow**

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation       |
|------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Lavandula</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** In spring, sow seeds under cover at 65°F (18°C). Germination takes 18–28 days. Lavenders grown from seed rarely produce identical plants. For a lavender hedge, where symmetry is important, grow plants from softwood cuttings taken from non-flowering stems in late spring.

**SITE** These plants are hardy to 5°F (-15°C)—it is wet conditions and high humidity that kill lavenders, not cold. Plant in a sunny position, in fertile, free-draining soil. These species will adapt to most soils, except heavy and wet ones, and will tolerate semi-shade. They grow well in containers using a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** Trim plants each year, either after flowering in early fall or in spring in cold, wet climates. Do not cut into the old wood because it will not produce new growth.

**HARVESTING** Cut the flowers in summer just as they open, to use fresh or to dry. Dry loose on a flat tray or make small bunches to hang up and dry. Pick leaves to use fresh or dry before flowering.

**How to use**

Use flowers and leaves sparingly in cooking. The flowers are used to scent sugar for making biscuits and cakes. A few leaves can add flavor to roast lamb. Lavender essential oil is used to treat burns, stings, or cuts, or can be added to the bath to calm children and relax adults. Rubbed into the temples, the oil can help ease headaches. It is also a good mosquito, midge, and fly repellent. Sprinkle a few drops on bedclothes to repel mosquitoes. Place sachets of dried lavender flowers and leaves with clothes to deter moths (see page 236).

▼ *Lavandula x intermedia*

OLD ENGLISH GROUP

OLD ENGLISH LAVENDER

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height 36 in (90 cm) and spread 12 in (60 cm). Aromatic, pointed spikes of pale blue-purple flowers appear in summer. *L. x intermedia* is a hybrid, bred to produce a high yield of essential oil.



▲ *Lavandula angustifolia*  
'Hidcote'

HIDCOTE LAVENDER

A hardy evergreen perennial, with a height of 22 in (55 cm) and a spread of 18 in (45 cm). An ideal lavender for hedges, it should be planted at a distance of 12 in (30 cm) apart.



▲ *Lavandula angustifolia*  
'Twickel Purple'

A hardy evergreen perennial, with a height of 18 in (45 cm) and a spread of 12 in (30 cm). This richly scented purple lavender is a hybrid, and can only be grown from cuttings.

**The classic flower** for drying and using in lavender bags

**Flower** is a clear, pale blue-purple, clustered on a tapering, pointed spike

**Leaf** is long, narrow, and silver-grey-green





*Lavandula*

# Tender lavender

 LAMIACEAE

These tender lavenders, which originate from North and South Africa, the Canary Islands, and Madeira, are truly worth collecting and should not be ignored because they are less hardy than other lavender species. They can make excellent summer bedding, are wonderful when grown in containers, flower all year round, and produce attractive foliage. Both *Lavandula candicans* and *L. x allardii* are high in essential oil, which can be used for burns and cuts, as a sedative, and as a fly and mosquito deterrent. *L. x christiana* looks stunning in flower, but does not produce a useful oil.

## How to grow

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation       |
|------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Lavandula</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Grow from cuttings taken in spring from non-flowering stems. Once rooted and well established, you can pot up but not too often since it prefers being pot-bound. Protect from frost.

**SITE** Tender lavenders make a fine display when grown outside from late spring to autumn. Plant in a fertile, well-draining soil, in full sun, and protect from cold wind. In other cold climates, they need to be brought in before the first frosts, ideally into a heated glasshouse or conservatory, and kept warm at around 40°F (5°C). They do not thrive in over-wet or humid conditions but are ideal for growing in containers, using a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** These lavenders have a very long flowering period from spring until early autumn. I have known *L. x christiana* to flower all year round in a container. Keep deadheading to encourage more blooms and to prevent the plant from becoming over-woody and straggly. Cut back hard (not into the hard wood) and repot in spring. Feed container plants regularly throughout the growing season using a liquid feed. Keep the plants well-ventilated throughout the season to prevent rot.

**HARVESTING** Cut flowers for drying when the third part of the trident starts to flower; the best time is summer when the air is drier. Dry on open trays or by hanging in small bunches.

## How to use

The dried flowers and leaves of these varieties look most attractive when added to potpourri or used in dried flower arrangements, and they could even be used to decorate a summer hat.



▲ *Lavandula dentata* var. *candicans*

LAVENDER CANDICANS,  
FRINGED LAVENDER

A tender evergreen perennial. Height 30 in (75 cm), spread of 24 in (60 cm). Attractive pale purple flowers topped with pale blue-purple bracts appear in early summer.



▲ *Lavandula x allardii*

LAVENDER ALLARDII,  
GIANT LAVENDER

A tender evergreen perennial. Height 48 in (1.2 m), spread 30 in (75 cm). Very long, pointed spikes covered in small blue and pale blue flowers appear in summer. The leaves are used to make essential oils.

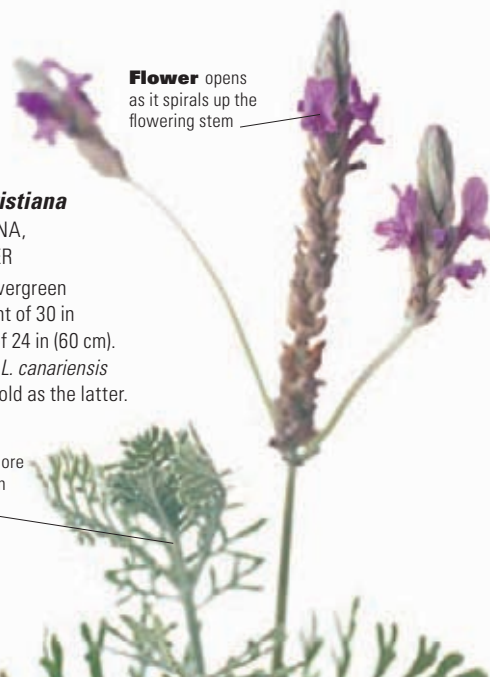
► *Lavandula x christiana*

LAVENDER CHRISTIANA,  
FEATHERED LAVENDER

A tender, unscented evergreen perennial, with a height of 30 in (75 cm) and a spread of 24 in (60 cm). It is a sterile hybrid of *L. canariensis* and *L. pinnata*, often sold as the latter.

**Leaf** is lacy and looks more like an *Artemisia* leaf than a standard lavender

**Flower** opens as it spirals up the flowering stem



Lavandula

Colorful bract lavender LAMIACEAE

The first time I saw these lavenders with their colorful bracts, or “ears” as they are commonly called, I thought they looked wonderful, like small bees or even butterflies. Each year, a new variety of bract lavender is discovered, and there are flowers with not only purple but, now, deep red bracts. Traditionally, bract lavenders were grown for their essential oil, which was used to repel insects, as an antiseptic agent, and as a relaxant. *Lavandula stoechas* is found growing wild throughout the Mediterranean area and is often confused with *L. stoechas* subsp. *pedunculata*, which is a native plant of central Spain and Portugal.

How to grow

| Herb      | Soil | Propagation       |
|-----------|------|-------------------|
| Lavandula | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** See pages 134–35 for details. (Bract lavenders grown from seed produce plants with different-colored and -sized bracts.) Identical plants need to be propagated from cuttings.

**SITE** Bract lavenders are hardy to 23°F (-5°C), and are at greater risk from wet conditions and high humidity than cold. See page 134 for details.

**MAINTENANCE** Bract lavenders have a long flowering period from late spring until early fall. Regular deadheading encourages new young growth; the plant will bush out and not become too woody. In the fall, cut back the plant to just above the old wood. Feed it well with liquid seaweed and protect from frost. In very cold climates, cut plants back in spring.

**HARVESTING** See pages 134–35 for details.

How to use

French lavender was probably one of the first lavenders to be used for its oils. It was used to alleviate nausea and as a mild sedative. An infusion made from the flowers of all kinds of *L. stoechas* is good as a gargle, or for washing minor scrapes to prevent infection. Lavender water, with its mild antiseptic properties, can also be used to wipe down kitchen work surfaces. To prevent a horse from being annoyed by flies, rub some lavender water around its head and ears.



▲ *Lavandula stoechas* ‘Kew Red’

LAVENDER ‘KEW RED’

Tender evergreen perennial. Height 16 in (40 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Unique cerise-crimson flowers clustered around small stalks topped with short, pale pink bracts are borne from late spring to early fall. It has narrow, aromatic, green leaves. This variety needs to be protected from wet winters.



◀ *Lavandula stoechas*  
**'Helmsdale'**

LAVENDER HELMSDALE

Frost-hardy evergreen perennial. Height 36 in (90 cm) and spread 24 in (60 cm). Lovely deep burgundy-purple flowers clustered around medium tapered stalks, topped with short burgundy bracts, appear from late spring until early fall. Its narrow green-gray leaves are camphor-scented. This variety originated in New Zealand.

**Leaf** is narrow, gray-green, and highly scented

**Flower** comprises small, dark-purple flowers topped with short, mauve-purple bracts

▶ *Lavandula stoechas*

FRENCH LAVENDER

Frost-hardy evergreen perennial. Height 20 in (45 cm) and spread 24 in (60 cm). Attractive small deep purple flowers are clustered around small flowering stalks, topped with short mauve-purple bracts from late spring until early fall. Its narrow green-gray leaves are camphor-scented.





*Levisticum***Lovage** APIACEAE

Lovage, as its common name indicates, was used as an aphrodisiac in the 16th century. It has many other historical claims: the Ancient Greeks used it to aid digestion and relieve flatulence, while travelers in the Middle Ages used it as a latter day “odor-eater” by lining their boots with the leaves. The French call it “céleri bâlard” (false celery) because its flavor and appearance are similar to that of celery. In my opinion, lovage is a forgotten culinary delight that adds a meaty flavor to dishes and, when combined with potatoess, makes a wonderful soup.

**CAUTION** Do not take medicinally if pregnant or if suffering from kidney disease. Do not eat in large amounts because it may cause nausea.

**How to grow**

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Levisticum</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring or late summer under protection at 65°F (18°C); germination takes six to ten days. Alternatively, sow seeds in early summer into prepared open ground, when the air temperature at night does not fall below 50°F (10°C). Divide established plants in spring, replanting them 24 in (60 cm) apart into a well-prepared site.

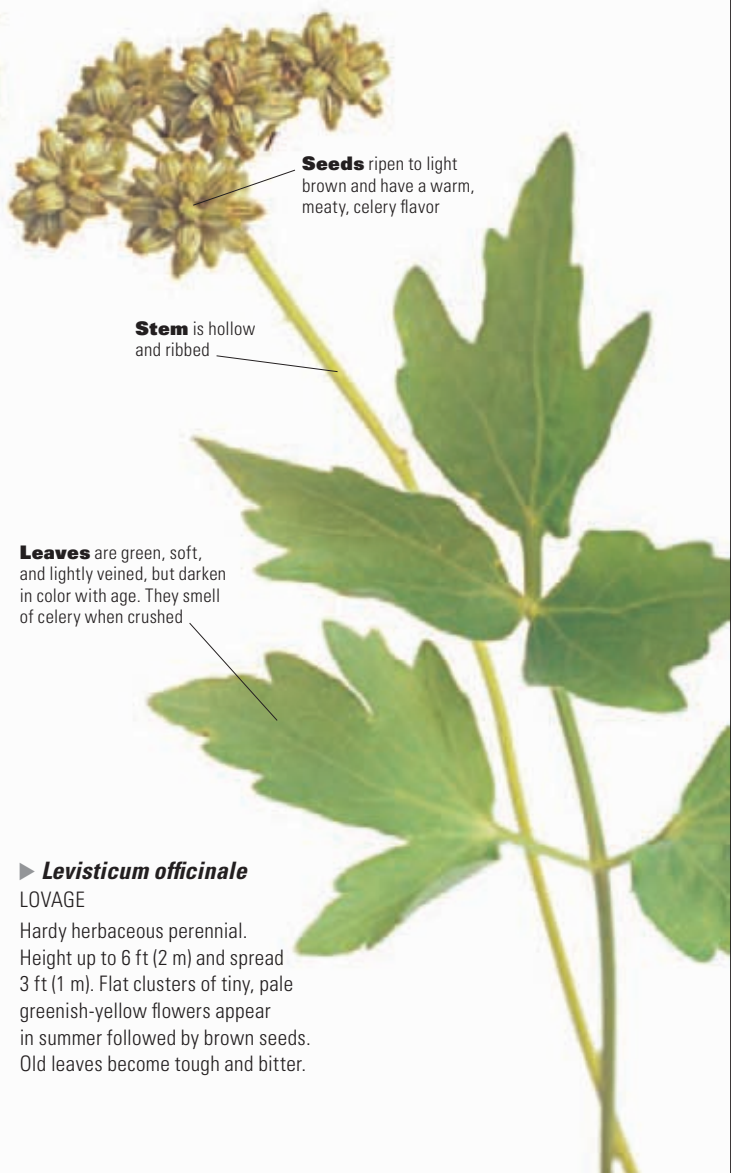
**SITE** Lovage is a large plant, so choose the position carefully, bearing in mind that it takes three to five years to mature. Plant in a rich, well-fed, well-drained soil in full sun or partial shade. It grows well in large containers in a soil-based substrate. Do not let the container dry out in summer and feed with comfrey (see page 39) in the growing season.

**MAINTENANCE** To keep the lovage leaves young and tender, pick them for use regularly and cut back all leaves in succession to encourage new growth. In the fall, after the plant has died back, feed well with well-rotted manure.

**HARVESTING** Pick the main crop of fresh young lovage leaves before flowering. Harvest the seeds as they turn brown, dry them well, and store for later use (see page 70).

**How to use**

Add the tender young leaves to salads, or cook as one would spinach. The root can be cooked as a vegetable, but should be peeled before use. Crushed seeds can be used in bread or on salads and rice, soups, and stews. When dried, the leaf and seed can be used in a similar way to celery salt. Medicinally, it is one of nature’s antibiotics, and an infusion of the seeds helps reduces water retention.



**Seeds** ripen to light brown and have a warm, meaty, celery flavor

**Stem** is hollow and ribbed

**Leaves** are green, soft, and lightly veined, but darken in color with age. They smell of celery when crushed

► *Levisticum officinale*

## LOVAGE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 6 ft (2 m) and spread 3 ft (1 m). Flat clusters of tiny, pale greenish-yellow flowers appear in summer followed by brown seeds. Old leaves become tough and bitter.

*Linum*

# Flax

LINACEAE

Flax has been grown for at least 7,000 years and was one of the first crops to be cultivated. In the Stone Age, it was used to produce textile fiber and seed, and in ancient Egypt, linen cloth made from flax was used to wrap the mummies. The Greeks used it to make sails for their boats. Linen, linseed, and rope are all made from this plant. An excellent companion plant in the organic garden, flax grown among vegetables increases pollination and therefore the vegetable yield, because bees are attracted to its lovely blue flowers.

**CAUTION** The seeds of some strains contain toxic glycosides, which become more toxic in drinking water. These cyanogenic glycosides have caused poisoning in livestock.

## How to grow

| Herb         | Soil | Propagation |
|--------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Linum</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Flax does not transplant well, so it is best to sow it directly into a prepared site. Sow it in late spring when the air temperature at night does not fall below 48°F (9°C). Thin to 12 in (30 cm) apart.

**SITE** Plant in fertile (rich in humus), well-draining soil, in a sunny, sheltered position. Planting this herb in large groups is not only attractive but will also help attract beneficial insects to the garden.

**MAINTENANCE** If growing as a linear crop, rather than in a group, weed the soil constantly in early spring to prevent it from being choked by weeds. After harvest, cut hard back to promote new growth.

**HARVESTING** Flax is ripe when stems turn yellow and the seed capsules turn brown. In wet summers the stems may remain green and the plants continue to flower long after the early seed capsules ripen. If this occurs, harvest when the majority are ripe. For fiber, harvest as the stems turn yellow, and dry thoroughly.

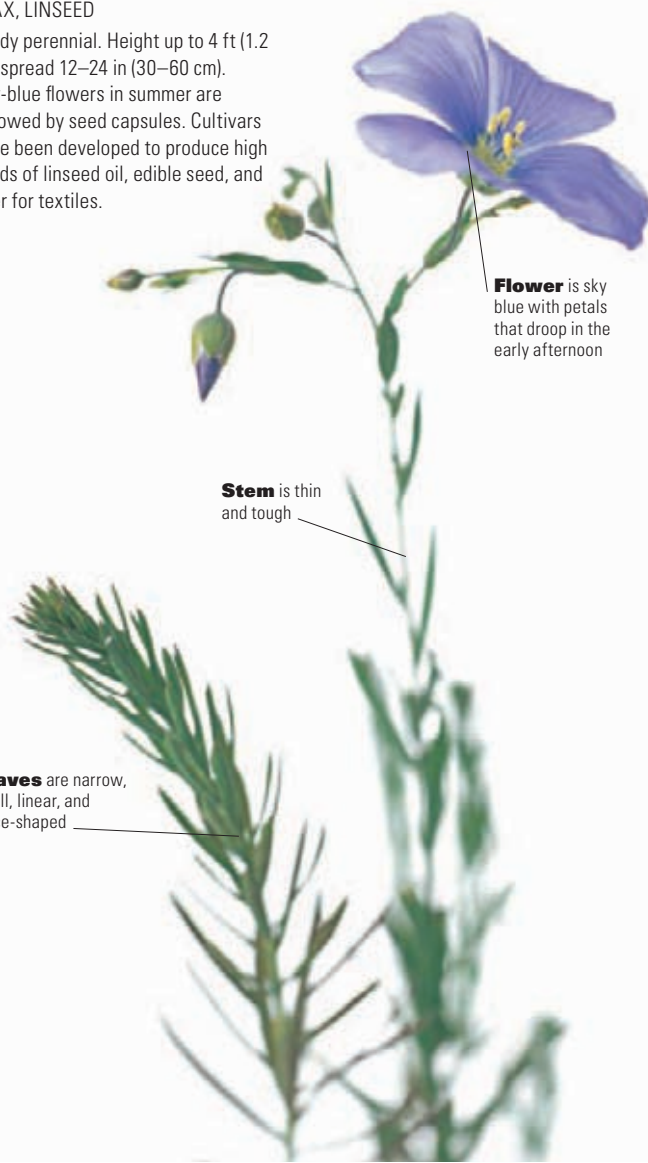
## How to use

The seed can be grown as a nutritious sprouting seed in seed trays, or added directly to bread, salads, or breakfast cereals. A vegetable oil is also obtained from the seed, although it needs to be refined before use. Medicinally, the oil is valuable for maintaining a healthy heart and circulation. The plant has a long history of use in the treatment of cancer and contains anticancer agents. It is also used to treat constipation and in poultices to treat boils and draw out splinters. Seeds and oils are used as an animal fodder. The oil is used in paint production as an emulsifier.

### ► *Linum perenne*

FLAX, LINSEED

Hardy perennial. Height up to 4 ft (1.2 m), spread 12–24 in (30–60 cm). Sky-blue flowers in summer are followed by seed capsules. Cultivars have been developed to produce high yields of linseed oil, edible seed, and fiber for textiles.



**Flower** is sky blue with petals that droop in the early afternoon

**Stem** is thin and tough

**Leaves** are narrow, small, linear, and lance-shaped

Luma

Luma MYRTACEAE

This wonderful, aromatic tree is a native of Chile and is a great addition to any sheltered herb garden. I have grown it very successfully in containers as an exhibit plant, and often show it off to the public in my herb display gardens at flower shows. When grown as a container plant, it reaches only 10 ft (3 m) tall, which is far short of the 50 ft (15 m) it can reach when grown as a tree. Luma’s common name in Spanish, “arrayán,” comes from the Arabic *ar-rayhan* or *rihan*, which translates as “the aromatic one” and refers to its fragrant leaf.

How to grow

| Herb | Soil | Propagation       |
|------|------|-------------------|
| Luma | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Remove the outer pith of the berry and sow fresh seeds in spring. Place under protection at 60°F (15°C). Germination takes one to two months, but can be longer. Grow on in a container, with winter protection, for a minimum of two years before planting out into a prepared site. Take softwood cuttings from the new growth in early summer, and treat the cuttings in the same way as seedlings.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in a sunny position. A hardy plant to 23°F (-5°C) in dry, cold winters, it needs protection in wet, cold, damp winters. It is ideal for growing next to a wall, where it will be sheltered from excessive wet. This tree makes an attractive, large container plant. Use a soil-based substrate and do not allow it to dry out in summer. Keep fairly dry in winter.

**MAINTENANCE** In cold climates, trim in early fall or spring. Prune back to the main branches in spring. Do not allow luma plants to dry out in hot summers.

**HARVESTING** Pick the leaves to use fresh as required. Pick the berries in the fall to use fresh or to dry.

How to use

The leaves and berries have a warm, spicy flavor and taste good in stews, soups, and marinades. The leaves are a good alternative to bay leaves. In Chile, the wood is used to make tools and charcoal. Medicinally, the seeds produce an aromatic oil that has antibiotic properties and is used in the treatment of respiratory diseases. Ferment leaves in mild olive oil for one month to make a treatment for dandruff and hair loss.

▼ Luma chequen

LUMA, ARRAYÁN

Hardy evergreen tree. Height 50 ft (15 m) and spread 20 ft (6 m). It produces pretty white flowers in summer, followed by dark blue-purple berries. Its aromatic leaves are slightly pointed and have a lighter green underside.

**Flower** is slightly aromatic, with white petals and masses of delicate stamens

**Stem** is covered in red bark which, as it matures, flakes off to reveal white areas

**Leaf** is aromatic, fairly tough, and shiny on the upper surface





*Lysimachia*

# Yellow loosestrife

 PRIMULACEAE

This tall, handsome European herb can be found growing in fens and wet woodland, along lake shores, and on the banks of rivers. It adapts well to damp gardens or pond sites. It was named “*Lysimachia*” in memory of King Lysimachus of Sicily, who promoted its medicinal benefits as a wound-healing herb. When fresh young leaves were bound around a wound, it was said to stem bleeding immediately. This herb is often confused with purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*, see page 187); both thrive in similar damp habitats and are invasive—but they are not related.

**CAUTION** This herb is considered a pernicious weed because it is so invasive.

## How to grow

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Lysimachia</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring and place in a cold frame. Germination takes two to four weeks. When well established, plant out into open ground 24 in (60 cm) apart. Divide established plants in fall or spring. Replant into a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in any garden soil that holds moisture during summer. The ideal site is close to a pond in partial shade. Alternatively, plant it in a small water-barrel garden. Do not let it take over.

**MAINTENANCE** An incredibly invasive plant, it not only self-seeds prolifically, but also spreads on creeping rhizomes, and has been known to swamp shorelines. In summer, cut back after flowering to prevent self-seeding. In winter and/or spring, dig up the plant and reduce the creeping rhizomes by half.

**HARVESTING** In spring, before the plant starts to flower, pick the leaves to use fresh, to preserve in vinegar (see pages 222–223), or to dry for medicinal use later in the year. In midsummer, pick whole sprigs that include leaf and flower and dry singly or in small bunches on a cheesecloth try for use as a natural hair dye.

## How to use

Although this herb is not used frequently by modern herbalists, it is still used in folk medicine to calm horses and cattle. Tie plant stems and leaves around a horse’s bridle to deter flies. It is also a good insect repellent for the home or outdoors. Burn the dried stems and leaves, and the smoke will not only deter all flying insects but also snakes. It is still used as a hair dye, highlighting blond hair and restoring graying hair to fairly blond.

### ▼ *Lysimachia vulgaris*

YELLOW LOOSESTRIFE, WILLOW WORT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 5 ft (1.5 m) and spread 3 ft (90 cm). Bright yellow, five-petaled flowers, attractive to dragonflies, grow in summer if the plant is well established. The mid-green leaf is dotted with either black or orange glands, or occasionally both.

**Flowers** are cup-shaped and grow in pyramidal spikes at the top of the plant

**Leaf** is long and lance-shaped. It is soft to touch and, like the stem, covered with fine hairs



*Lythrum*

# Purple loosestrife

LYTHRACEAE

The name “lythrum” means “gore” in Greek and was coined by a doctor who used loosestrife to heal warriors’ battle wounds and stem bleeding. Later, the plant leaves were used for tanning leather because of their high tannin content. The first time I saw it growing in profusion was at the water’s edge at the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge, in England, where it looked magnificent. It is highly rated by beekeepers, who consider it a good plant for overwintering colonies of bees, which collect pollen from its flowers right up until late summer.

## How to grow

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation |
|----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Lythrum</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** The seeds are very small and this prolific plant can, when mature, produce over 2.7 million seeds. Before sowing, mix fresh seeds with fine sand or flour to make them easier to manage. Do not cover. Place the container outside to expose it to all weathers, including frost. Germination takes five to seven months. Pot up when the seedlings are large enough to handle. Plant in a prepared open site when the root ball is well formed. Established plants can be divided in the fall. Replant into a prepared, open site.

**SITE** Plant in a damp, marshlike soil, in full sun or partial shade. It looks very attractive when grown in large clumps near water, where it attracts insects and dragonflies. It needs to be kept moist, and will only grow well in a container if sunk into the corner of a pond.

**MAINTENANCE** This invasive herb needs to be controlled to prevent it from competing with and replacing native grasses, sedges, and other flowering plants. In fall and spring, dig up spreading plants to maintain control. If it is out of control, introduce the beetle *Galerucella californiensis* to strip the leaf and flower. In the fall, cut back plants before the seed sets and starts dispersing.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves before flowering to use fresh or to dry for later use. Harvest the flowers in summer, just before they are all fully opened, to use fresh or to dry.

## How to use

It was once used to treat chronic diarrhea and dysentery, to clean wounds, and as a gargle and an eyewash. Currently, it is being researched for its healing properties relating to intestinal illnesses.



▲ *Lythrum salicaria*

PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 4 ft (1.2 m) and spread 30 in (75 cm). Beautiful tall spikes of small magenta flowers appear all summer. The mid-green leaves are stalkless and lance-shaped, with either a rounded or heart-shaped base where the leaf joins the stem. The flowers attract not only bees and butterflies, but also dragonflies and hoverflies.

Malva

# Mallow

MALVACEAE

In the Middle Ages, mallow was used as a calming antidote to aphrodisiacs and love potions. Before this, the Romans ate the young shoots as a vegetable delicacy, and the root was also used as a toothbrush. This herb is a native wildflower in parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia, growing in various situations, from grassy meadows to along the roadside. It is very attractive to many insects, and can be grown in borders or the vegetable garden to encourage their presence. The flowers are sometimes included in other products as a natural colorant.

## How to grow

| Herb  | Soil | Propagation |
|-------|------|-------------|
| Malva | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in the fall. Place the container outside to expose it to all weathers. Germination is erratic. In early summer, when young plants are well established, plant out in a prepared site at 24 in (60 cm) intervals. In late spring or summer, take cuttings from firm lower shoots.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained, fertile soil in a sunny position. If the soil is damp, the plant stems will become soft and need staking in summer. *Malva moschata* is suitable for growing in containers in a soil-based substrate, but has a tall, untidy habit.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back stems after flowering to clear up, and to promote new growth and a second flowering. In the fall, cut stems back to the lower leaves.

**HARVESTING** Pick young fresh leaves as required throughout the spring. Harvest fresh flowers throughout the flowering period. Dig up the roots of the second year's growth to dry for medicinal use.

## How to use

The tender young leaves and flowering tips of mallow can be used in salads or steamed as a vegetable. A decoction made from the roots and leaves can be added to bathwater to ease skin rashes, boils, and ulcers. Medicinally, this herb is thought to be inferior to marsh mallow (*Althea officinalis*), which is higher in mucilage and therefore better for coughs, but there is current research into mallow's abilities to alleviate urinary complaints.



**Root** can be cut into slices and used to draw out splinters and thorns.

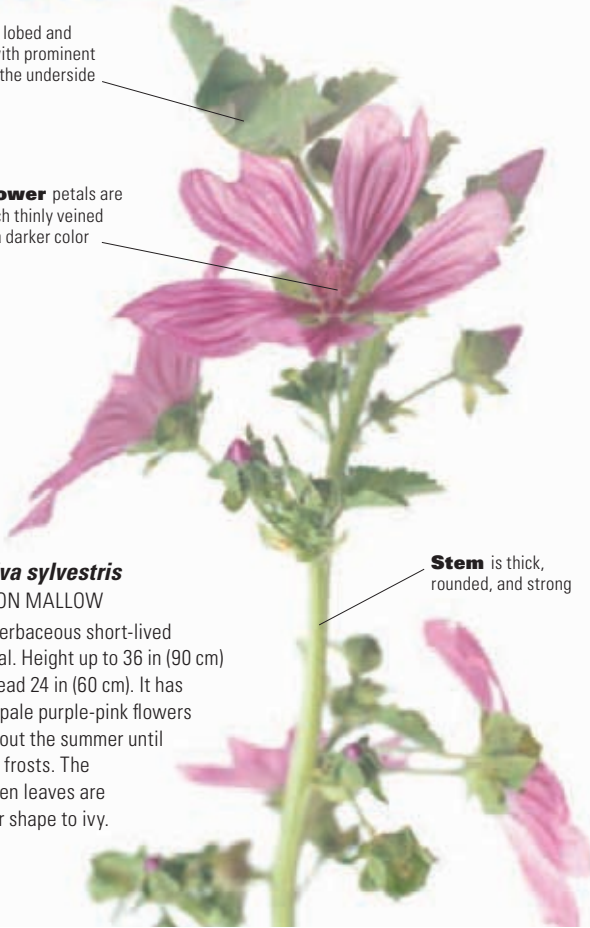


◀ **Malva moschata**  
MUSK MALLOW

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 32 in (80 cm) and spread 24 in (60 cm). Scented pinkish, sometimes white, flowers from late summer to early fall. This species has milder medicinal properties than common mallow (*Malva sylvestris*).

**Leaf** is lobed and downy with prominent veins on the underside

**Flower** petals are each thinly veined in a darker color



▶ **Malva sylvestris**  
COMMON MALLOW

Hardy herbaceous short-lived perennial. Height up to 36 in (90 cm) and spread 24 in (60 cm). It has veined, pale purple-pink flowers throughout the summer until the first frosts. The mid-green leaves are a similar shape to ivy.

**Stem** is thick, rounded, and strong



*Mandragora*

# Mandrake SOLANACEAE

There has been a resurgence of interest in mandrake due to the *Harry Potter* books and movies. This herb has close links with magic ritual and is regarded by some as evil. In folklore, it was thought fatal to dig up the plant—it would scream piercingly and drive a person to suicide. Mandrake root was thought to have anesthetic properties, and a piece was given to patients before operations. This plant is toxic and should be taken only under professional supervision; however, it bears beautiful flowers in early spring and is beneficial as an early nectar source, so is an asset in any herb garden.

**CAUTION** Mandrake is toxic and should be taken only under medical supervision. Avoid during pregnancy.

## How to grow

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Mandragora</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in the fall in a free-draining substrate. Place in a cold frame. Germination can take from four months to two years. In fall, carefully take root cuttings from established plants since it does not respond well to being disturbed. In cold, wet climates grow on for two seasons in a container, protected from adverse weather, until well established. In spring, plant out in a well-prepared, open site.

**SITE** Plant in deep, well-drained, fertile soil in full sun or partial shade. It does not do well in chalk or gravel soils, and is prone to rot in clay or cold, wet soils. It has a long root system—up to 4 ft (1.2 m)—and is not well suited to container growing. If grown in pots in a soil-based substrate, plants remain small and do not set fruit.

**MAINTENANCE** This herb is very prone to attack from slugs, which will totally obliterate the plant. Mark the spot where it is planted; it will reappear in late summer.

**HARVESTING** Dig up roots in the fall when the plant is dormant. Use the root fresh for juice extraction or dried in decoctions.

## How to use

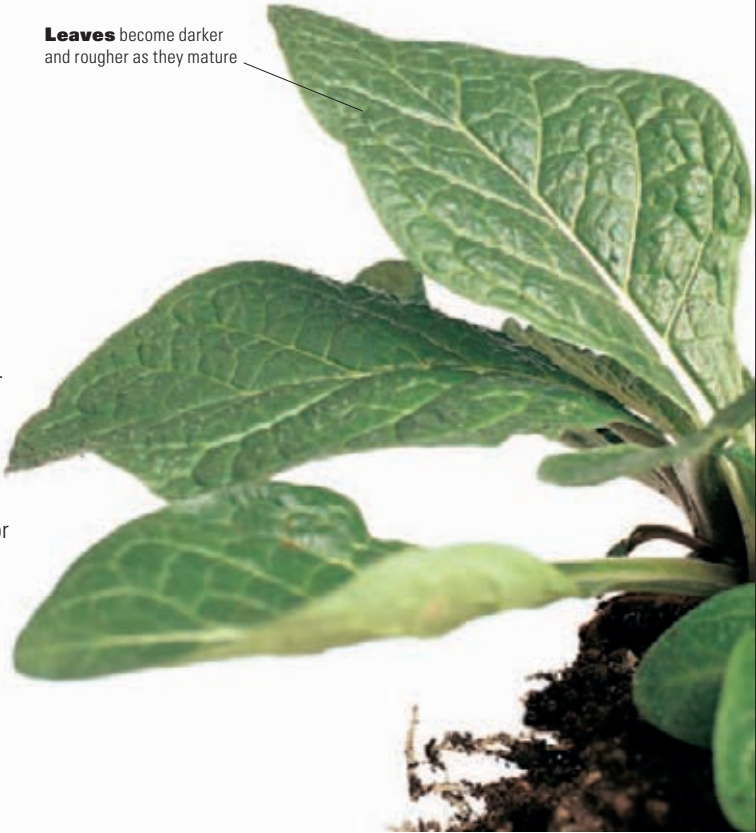
Mandrake root is widely used in homeopathy as a treatment for coughs and asthma. Modern-day witches still hold it in high regard for its supposed magical properties. Do not confuse it with American mandrake (*Podophyllum peltatum*).



◀ *Mandragora officinarum*  
MANDRAKE, SATAN'S APPLE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 2 in (5 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Small, bell-shaped, white-blue flowers in spring, followed in late summer by aromatic, round yellow fruits (in warm climates only). The large oval leaves have a rough, slightly prickly texture.

Leaves become darker and rougher as they mature



*Marrubium*

# White horehound

LAMIACEAE

I am fascinated by the thick, silvery hairs that grow on the young stem and the underside of the young leaves of white horehound. It creates the impression that a silvery spider's web has spun them together. The Roman physician Galen used this herb to treat chest complaints, and it is still used for this purpose. Quite apart from the herb's medicinal benefits, it is well worth growing as an unusual ornamental plant. White horehound should not be confused with black horehound (*Ballota nigra*), which has an unpleasant scent and can be used to expel intestinal worms.

**CAUTION** Do not take during pregnancy or if you suffer from stomach ulcers.

## How to grow

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation |
|------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Marrubium</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring and place under protection at 65°F (18°C). Germination takes one to two weeks, but can be erratic. Alternatively, take softwood cuttings in summer from new growth. In cold and wet climates, grow on seedlings or cuttings in a container for the first winter. Plant out the following spring in a well-prepared site. Propagate established plants by division in spring (see page 53), replanting in a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in a sunny position in well-drained alkaline soil. Protect from cold winds. This plant can be grown in a container. Do not overwater, and use a free-draining soil-based substrate mixed with extra grit to improve drainage further.

**MAINTENANCE** In spring, divide established clumps and prune new growth to maintain shape. In summer, cut back after flowering to prevent the plant from self-seeding or becoming straggly.

**HARVESTING** Gather the leaves and flowering tops in late spring, on a dry morning, just before the plant flowers; this is when the plant oils are at their richest, and are best for using fresh, for drying, or for preserving in wheatgerm or olive oil.

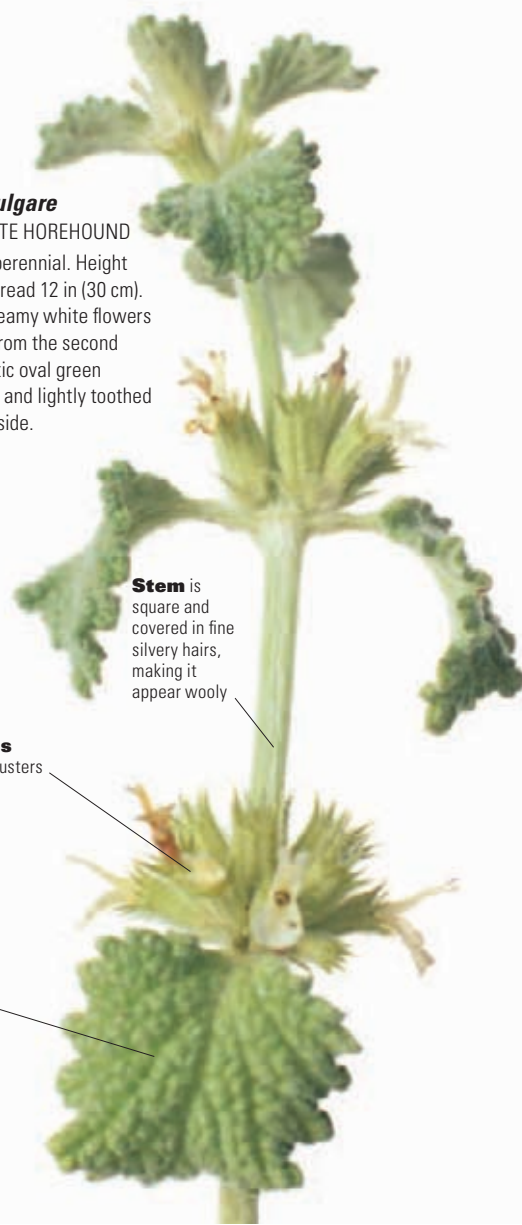
## How to use

This useful medicinal herb treats bronchitis and pertussis, and is used in most cough mixtures to clear phlegm. The leaves and stems are boiled and used in candied products, cough drops, and syrups. Extracts of white horehound are used in traditional ale-making and are brewed to make Horehound Ale in Britain. An infusion of the leaf can be used as an organic spray to deter cankerworm in fruit trees.

### ► *Marrubium vulgare*

HOREHOUND, WHITE HOREHOUND

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 18 in (45 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Clusters of small creamy white flowers appear in summer from the second season. The aromatic oval green leaves are wrinkled and lightly toothed with a wooly underside.



**Stem** is square and covered in fine silvery hairs, making it appear wooly

**Flowers** grow in clusters

**Leaf** is wrinkled on the upper surface and wooly on the underside

*Melissa***Lemon balm** LAMIACEAE

In ancient times, lemon balm was planted beside the front door to drive away evil spirits. In the Middle Ages it was used to prevent baldness, as a lucky love charm, and to help cure mad-dog bites, toothache, and even neck problems. Research now shows that it can be beneficial in the treatment of cold sores by, on average, halving the healing time and reducing the chance of further outbreaks. The scent of lemon balm is a delightful asset in the garden—there is nothing nicer than going out on a summer's evening and gently rubbing lemon balm leaves to fill the air with lemon fragrance.



**Lemon balms** resemble their relative, mint, but have a wonderful lemon scent.

**How to grow**

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation   |
|----------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Melissa</i> | Sand | Seed/cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds (*Melissa officinalis* only) in spring under cover at 68°F (20°C). Germination takes one to two weeks. Do not overwater the seedlings, because they are prone to “damping off”—a fungal disease. Take softwood cuttings in early summer. Plant out when the plants are well established. Divide established plants in early fall or early spring, replanting into a well-prepared site.

**SITE** This plant will grow in all soils except waterlogged ones. Melissa is invasive in light, fertile soils. The best situation is well-drained soil in a sunny position. All forms of this plant grow well in containers. Use a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** To maintain a supply of fresh leaves and to prevent the plant from becoming woody or straggly, cut back after flowering. This will also stop self-seeding. This plant is invasive, so dig up roots as necessary. This herb is related to mint and, like mint, is prone to the rust virus (see page 148). If affected, dig up plants with the virus and burn them.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves before the flowers open to use fresh or to dry. This is when the highest yield of leaf oil is available.

**How to use**

The lemon scent of the leaves is lost in cooking. Use the leaves fresh in green or fruit salads. Medicinally, it is antiviral and antibacterial, helps lower fevers, and improves digestion, as well as being a mild antidepressant. It helps heal and prevent cold sores. Rub the leaf into the skin for a good natural insect repellent. Applied in this way, it also helps reduce skin irritation caused by insect bites.



▲ *Melissa officinalis* 'All Gold'

**GOLDEN LEMON BALM**

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 30in (75cm) and spread 18in (45cm) or more. Clusters of small, cream-colored flowers in summer. The lemon-scented, golden-yellow leaves are oval in shape and textured. Since the leaves are prone to scorching, plant this variety in partial shade. Cut back in summer to encourage new growth and fresh leaf color. This variety can be propagated successfully only by softwood cuttings or root division.



► ***Melissa officinalis***

LEMON BALM, SWEET BALM

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 30 in (75 cm) and spread 18 in (45 cm) or more. Clusters of small, cream-colored flowers in summer. The flowers have a light lemon flavor when eaten. The leaves are lemon-scented, oval, toothed, and textured. Add leaves to stewed fruit to help reduce the tartness.

**Leaves** taste better raw than cooked. When crushed they have a very good lemon scent

**Stem** has fine hairs

**Leaf** is covered in fine hairs with toothed edges

**Flowers** grow in clusters around the stem. They have a sweet lemon flavor and are rich in nectar, making them a very good bee plant



◀ ***Melissa officinalis* 'Aurea'**

VARIEGATED LEMON BALM

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 24 in (60 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm) or more. Clusters of small, pale cream flowers in summer. The leaves are lemon-scented, textured, and variegated but revert to pure green in summer. This variety can be propagated successfully only from softwood cuttings or by root division.

Mentha

Classic mints LAMIACEAE

Mints are promiscuous herbs. They have successfully interbred, crossbred, and hybridized, which is wonderful for the plant collector, but difficult for me when having to decide which examples to write about. I have chosen to divide the mints up into classic mints and peppermints (see page 150). Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) is without doubt the best-known of the classic mints. It was introduced to Europe by the Romans. It is still highly regarded and in demand as a culinary herb, as a source of leaves for refreshing mint tea, and as a useful home herbal remedy to aid digestion.

How to grow

| Herb   | Soil | Propagation   |
|--------|------|---------------|
| Mentha | Loam | Root cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** In fall or early spring, take root cuttings (see page 56). Spring cuttings take two weeks before new growth emerges. Softwood cuttings can be taken in late spring from new nonflowering growth. Divide mature plants in spring or fall. Only pennyroyal grows true from seed; others set seed, but are variable.

**SITE** The healthiest plants are those that are left to spread naturally. Plant in rich, well-drained soil in a sunny position. It grows well in containers in a soil-based substrate. Repot each year in the fall to prevent root rot and to encourage abundant leaf the following season. Never plant two different mints together: they will intermarry and their flavors will become inferior.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut hard back in summer and feed with liquid comfrey (see page 39). Tender new growth will be ready to pick in six to eight weeks. A fungus, *Puccinia mentha*, is a common problem. Known as “mint rust,” it is identified by its small rusty spots, which cover the leaf, starting on the underside. The only organic way to get rid of this disease is to either dig up the plant and destroy it, or cover it with straw and set it alight. This dramatic action will sterilize the soil and burn the contaminated leaves.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves before flowering, or after it has been cut back and the plant has started to regrow.

How to use

Medicinally, it relieves indigestion, nausea, stomach gas, diarrhea, and colic. Mint tea soothes colds, and cold mint tea can be used as a wash to bring fever down, or as a throat gargle.



◀ *Mentha spicata* var. *crispum*  
CURLY MINT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 24 in (60 cm), spread indefinite. Small, lilac-pink flowers grow in spikes in summer. The spearmint-scented and -flavored leaves are very crinkled—the first time I grew this plant, I thought that the leaves were diseased.



▲ *Mentha pulegium* 'Upright'  
PENNYROYAL UPRIGHT

Hardy, semi-evergreen perennial. Height 6 in (15 cm), spread indefinite. Small mauve flowers grow in clusters around the stem in summer. The small leaves are highly peppermint-scented; use sparingly in cooking. It is an excellent insect repellent and gives relief from stings. It should not be taken internally by when pregnant, or when suffering from kidney disease. It can be raised easily from seed and comes true, but is best propagated from cuttings.



▲ ***Mentha spicata* 'Tashkent'**

MINT TASHKENT

Hardy, herbaceous perennial. Height up to 32 in (80 cm) and indefinite spread. Small mauve flowers grow in cylindrical spikes in summer. Leaves are spearmint-scented and -flavored, mid-green, oval in shape, and wrinkled. This variety has one of the best culinary flavors.

► ***Mentha spicata***

SPEARMINT, GARDEN MINT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 24 in (60 cm) and spread indefinite. Small, purple-mauve flowers grow in cylindrical spikes in summer. The spearmint-scented and -flavored leaves are mid-green, oval in shape, and wrinkled. Spearmint can vary in flavor and leaf color, depending on the soil in which it is grown.



**Flower** has a lovely sweet minty flavor

**Leaf** is lance-shaped with a strong spearmint scent when crushed

**Leaf** has a distinctly serrated edge



Mentha

Peppermints LAMIACEAE

Peppermint is a wonderfully useful herb: it attracts beneficial butterflies and hoverflies to the garden, smells lovely, aids digestion, and eases headaches. It has been used medicinally for thousands of years. The ancient Egyptians knew its medicinal properties, and the Japanese have been extracting menthol oil from the leaves for at least 2,000 years. Today, peppermint oil is found in toothpaste, indigestion tablets, and confectionery. There are many different varieties available and some are more invasive than others. Variegated species tend to be weaker and therefore more easily contained.

How to grow

| Herb   | Soil | Propagation   |
|--------|------|---------------|
| Mentha | Loam | Root cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Peppermint is a hybrid of water mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and spearmint (*Mentha spicata*). It does not set viable seed, so it is best propagated from root cuttings (see page 52) taken in spring and fall, or from softwood cuttings taken in late spring from new nonflowering growth. Alternatively, propagate established plants by root division (see page 53) in fall or spring.

**SITE** For maximum leaf flavor and oil production, plant in full sun in well-drained fertile soil. See page 148 for more details.

**MAINTENANCE** To maintain healthy plants, divide established plants every few years. Cut back after flowering to encourage new leaf growth, and feed with liquid comfrey (see page 39). New growth will be ready for picking in six to eight weeks. In winter when the plant has died back, feed with well-rotted manure. Peppermints are prone to mint rust (see page 148). If plants become invasive, dig up root runners with care—any root left behind will grow into a new plant.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves before flowering, or after cutting back when the plant has started to regrow up until the first frosts.

How to use

Strongly flavored, peppermint can overwhelm more subtle flavors, but it tastes good in desserts such as chocolate mousse. It is the key ingredient in remedies for indigestion and irritable bowel syndrome, and is a decongestant for colds and rhinitis. The oil is antiseptic and is used to treat itching skin and as a mosquito deterrent.



◀ *Mentha x piperita* f. *citrata*  
EAU-DE-COLOGNE MINT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 32 in (80 cm) and spread indefinite. Small, pale purple flowers grow in spikes in summer. The eau-de-cologne-scented, peppermint-flavored leaves are dark brown tinged with green. You can add fresh mint leaves to bathwater for a refreshing effect.



▲ *Mentha x piperita* 'Logee'  
LOGEE MINT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 18 in (45 cm), spread indefinite. Small, pale purple flowers grow in terminal, cylindrical spikes in summer. Logee mint's leaves are green and white variegated, generally oval in shape but pointed and toothed, and peppermint-scented and -flavored. This mint can be used in the same way as standard peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*), both for cooking and as an herbal remedy.



▲ *Mentha x piperita* f. *citrata* 'Orange'

ORANGE MINT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 32 in (80 cm) and spread indefinite. Small, pale pink-purple flowers grow in spikes in summer until fall. It has large, rounded, oval, purple-and orange-tinged dark green leaves that have a definite orange scent. It is especially good with fresh fruit salads.

► *Mentha x piperita*

PEPPERMINT, BLACK PEPPERMINT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 24 in (60 cm) and spread indefinite. Small, pale purple flowers grow in terminal, cylindrical spikes in summer. The edible leaves have a strong peppermint flavor and scent; the flowers taste of sweet peppermint. The leaves are pointed, oval, and toothed, and are dark plum-brown tinged with green.



*Meum*

# Meu

APIACEAE

This attractive aromatic plant grows in mountain grasslands and is, in my opinion, underused in the modern herb garden, where it can look most attractive grown as a soft edging plant. It grows wild in the Scottish Highlands, and was once eaten there as a vegetable; it is a close relative of the carrot. The fresh leaves also offer a light, delicious, spicy flavor—a mixture of lovage and parsley—and are good in soup. Traditionally it is reputed to spice up a flagging love life, and has been used to treat a variety of medical problems; most commonly it is used as an aid to digestion.



**Root** is long and fibrous, with a strong spicy flavor.

## How to grow

| Herb        | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Meum</i> | Loam | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** Stratify the seeds (see page 45) before sowing them. In the fall, sow in a container and place outdoors. Germination should occur the following spring, but can be erratic. In early fall, propagate established plants by root division. Replant into well-prepared open ground.

**SITE** Plant in full sun in fertile soil that holds its moisture in summer. It adapts to most soils, except waterlogged or arid ones. It can be grown in a deep container, using a soil-based substrate, but its long taproot does not respond well to being too confined. Each fall, repot using a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** To grow meu as a root vegetable, mulch with well-rotted manure in the fall. If you want a leaf crop, feed with liquid comfrey feed (see page 39) in early spring. Feed once only, or the leaves and root will grow soft and lose flavor.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh either before or after flowering. The root of three-year-old plants can be dug up in early fall and used fresh.

## How to use

Fresh leaves taste similar to lovage (see page 138), but are spicier and taste good with omelets and cheese, and in salads and soups. If cows eat the leaves mixed with grass, it makes their milk and butter taste spicy. A member of the carrot family, meu has roots with a strong spicy flavor, which are good in casseroles and soups. The roots can also be used to make a spicy wine. Medicinally, meu leaves and roots were used for curing snakebite, coughs, and flatulence. Today it is little used, but it is good for digestive problems.

### ▼ *Meum athamanticum* MEU, SPIGEL

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 12 in (30 cm) and spread 8 in (20 cm). Umbels of small white flowers with a hint of pink around the edges in early summer. The bright green leaves are feathery, with a light, spicy scent.



**Leaf** resembles a soft, green feather



*Monarda*

# Wild bergamot LAMIACEAE

This herb is worth growing for its flower alone, which reminds me of a flamboyant lady's hat feathers. A native of North America, wild bergamot was used medicinally by the Oswego Indians to treat colds and bronchial complaints. In the US, it is still drunk as a refreshing tea, called Oswego tea. In 1773, following the Boston Tea Party, wild bergamot was introduced to North American settlers. It became a popular substitute for India tea. Although the leaves smell similar, do not confuse wild bergamot with bergamot orange (*Citrus bergamia*), which give Earl Grey its distinctive scent and taste.

## How to grow

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation |
|----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Monarda</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring under protection at 65°F (18°C); germination takes one to two weeks. Do not overwater the seedlings, because they are prone to “damping off”—a fungal disease. In cool climates, take root cuttings from the creeping rhizomes in spring. Take cuttings from the growing stems in early summer. Divide established plants in the fall.

**SITE** There is some difference regarding site preference. *Monarda fistulosa* likes well-drained soil and a sunny position, *M. didyma* rich fertile soil that retains moisture in the summer and partial shade. Neither likes cold wet soil. Bergamot grows well in a large pot with some shade from the midday sun. Use a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** Dig up plants over three years old, remove the dead center, and replant in a prepared site. All *Monarda* species are susceptible to mildew and rust fungus. If either appear, cut the plant back to ground level, remove contaminated parts, and burn them.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves to use as required. For drying, pick off the flowers and leaves from second-year plants just as they start to bloom.

### ► *Monarda didyma*

BEE BALM BERGAMOT, RED BERGAMOT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 32 in (80 cm) and spread indefinite. It has wonderful, large red flowers that are surrounded by red bracts throughout the summer, and mid-green, toothed, oval, strongly scented leaves that make a refreshing cup of tea.

## How to use

The leaf has a strong culinary flavor that goes well with meat. The flowers have a milder, sweeter flavor. Medicinally, a decoction of leaves makes a steam inhalant to soothe bronchial complaints. Bergamot essential oil is used in aromatherapy to treat depression and to fight infection. It is also used by perfume and soap manufacturers.



*Murraya*

# Curry tree

RUTACEAE

When I first started herb farming, the only species of curry plant that was available was *Helichrysum italicum*—an evergreen shrub with silver foliage that fills the air with a curry scent. Today, the leaf from the native Sri Lankan curry tree (*Murraya koenigii*) is available as a culinary delight. In Asian cooking, the curry leaf itself is rarely eaten, but is used as a flavoring in dishes but is thrown away before the dish is served. Interestingly, there is an old Indian saying that compares a curry leaf to a person who is only wanted for a particular use before being discarded.

## How to grow

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation       |
|----------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Murraya</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring under protection at 72°F (22°C); germination takes two to four weeks, but can be erratic. An easier method of propagation is to lift and replant the small suckers that grow around the base of a mature shrub. Grow on the suckers in small pots. Do not plant out for at least two seasons.

**SITE** Plant in fertile, light soil in full sun or partial shade. Young plants need watering once a day for the first three years. It will adapt to hot, dry climates, although the plant will be less productive and smaller. This tropical plant needs protection when temperatures fall below 55°F (13°C). In cool climates, grow as a container plant using a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** In the fall, feed the curry tree with well-rotted manure. If grown in a container, feed once a week throughout the growing season with liquid comfrey (see page 39). Mature plants can be cut back in winter. Young plants are prone to aphid attack; treat with liquid horticultural soap.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves as required. Dry leaves quickly lose their flavor.

### ► *Murraya koenigii*

CURRY TREE, KAHDİ PATTÀ

Tropical, evergreen shrub. Height up to 20 ft (6 m) and spread up to 15 ft (5 m). Clusters of pretty, fragrant, star-shaped white flowers appear in summer, followed by edible black berries. The large, oval, dark green leaves have a bitter, pleasant, aromatic flavor when eaten, and produce a curry aroma when brushed against or crushed.

## How to use

Leaves flavor vegetable and lentil curries in southern India, and chicken and meat curries in Sri Lanka. Medicinally, curry is used to treat digestive disorders, diarrhea, dysentery, and hemorrhoids. Leaves are used as a poultice for burns, bruises, and skin eruptions, and have weight-reducing properties. The juice of the leaf makes an eye-brightening wash.

Leaf is large, oval, and dark green



Myrrhis

# Sweet cicely

APIACEAE

The frothy, cream-colored flowers are one of the earliest to appear in the herb garden, and herald the arrival of spring. Originally, the roots of this herb were boiled and chewed as a breath sweetener. The flavor is like a mix of aniseed and parsnip. *Myrrhis odorata* is closely related to *Osmorhiza longistylis*, which was used extensively by Native American tribes. Both species of sweet cicely were used as an herbal tonic for the young and elderly. In the past, the seeds were crushed and used to make a furniture polish that was particularly good for oak.



**Seeds**, when green, have a sharp aniseed flavor, and when dark brown and ripe have a sweet aniseed taste.

## How to grow

| Herb    | Soil | Propagation |
|---------|------|-------------|
| Myrrhis | Soil | Loam        |

**PROPAGATION** These large seeds need stratifying to germinate (see page 45). In cold climates, sow the seed fresh in the fall. Use garden soil, and place the container outside. Germination occurs the following spring. Take root cuttings in fall and spring. Divide established plants in the fall.

**SITE** Plant in a soil rich in humus, in light shade. It will not grow in humid or hot climates. It is not an ideal pot plant because it has a long taproot. In light, fertile soil, contain the root to prevent it from becoming invasive; grow it in a large container, using loam-based substrate, in partial shade.

**MAINTENANCE** To prevent self-seeding, collect unripe green seeds to use in salads, and then cut back hard. Remove the whole taproot if you wish to prevent it from rooting.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves to use fresh before or after flowering. Pick flowers just as the cluster opens and harvest seeds green when required. Store seeds when they have ripened to a dark brown color. Make sure that they are dry.

► **Myrrhis odorata**  
SWEET CICELY

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 3 ft (90 cm) and spread 2 ft (60 cm). The scented flowers, which appear in early spring and last until early summer, are followed by long, angular seeds that ripen to black. The flowers can be made into a refreshing cordial drink.

## How to use

Add leaves to soups, stews, and as a natural sweetener and flavoring for stewed fruit and fruit salads. Cook the root as a vegetable or grate it raw to add to salads. The seeds when green add crunch to a salad. Brown seeds add aniseed flavoring to fruit. The root is used for digestive complaints, coughs, and as a tonic, and makes a good wine.





*Myrtus*

# Myrtle MYRTACEAE

If I had to choose my all-time “Top 10” herbs, myrtle would feature in the list. It is the herb of love, and is dedicated to the goddess Venus—myrtle was grown around her temples, and she is often shown rising from the sea carrying a sprig of myrtle. Traditionally, brides carry a piece of myrtle in their bouquets as a symbol of love and constancy. Quite apart from its romantic history, myrtle looks wonderful growing in the garden or in containers. It smells fragrant and is an excellent culinary herb. It goes particularly well with barbecued food, to which it adds a distinctly Mediterranean flavor.



**Berries** are known as “mursins” in the Middle East, where they are used as a spice.

## How to grow

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation       |
|---------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Myrtus</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** In spring, separate the pulp of the ripe berry from the seed. Sow fresh, and place under protection at 60°F (15°C). Germination normally takes one to two months, but can take longer. Alternatively, take softwood cuttings in summer from nonflowering shoots. With both methods, pot up when well rooted, and grow on for two seasons before planting into a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in full sun. Myrtle is quite hardy, but wetness will kill it quicker than cold. *Myrtus communis* survives in temperatures of 14°F (-10°C). Variegated forms are less hardy surviving at 23°F (-5°C). In exposed sites, plant against a sheltered south- or west-facing wall. They grow well in containers, using a soil-based substrate. Do not pot on too often; myrtle prefers to be pot-bound.

**MAINTENANCE** Feed once in spring with well-rotted compost. Feed container-grown plants weekly during the growing season. Over-fed plants will not flower. In Mediterranean climates, trim myrtle in the fall. In colder climates, trim in spring.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves throughout the year. Harvest fresh flowers as required in summer. Pick berries in late fall.

## How to use

Add leaves and berries to stews and soups. Use flowers as a garnish. In rural areas of Italy and Sardinia, cooking is flavored with the smoke of burning myrtle wood. Add myrtle leaves to the glowing coals of a barbecue to obtain a similar effect.

Medicinally, the oil from the berries is used externally to alleviate acne. A leaf infusion is used to treat urinary infections.



▲ *Myrtus communis* subsp. *tarentina* ‘Variegata’  
VARIEGATED SMALL-LEAVED MYRTLE

Hardy, evergreen shrub. Height and spread up to 3ft (1m). Very attractive, fragrant white flowers with golden stamens appear in summer, followed by blue-black berries. The small, oval, light green and white variegated leaves are aromatic when crushed (though not as strong as *M. communis* ‘Merion’). These leaves are the smallest of all the myrtles. Hardy to 23°F (-5°C). Do not overwater in winter.

► ***Myrtus communis***

MYRTLE

Hardy evergreen shrub. Height and spread up to 10 ft (3 m). Very attractive, fragrant white flowers with golden stamens in summer, followed by blue-black berries. The oval, dark green leaves are aromatic when crushed and are a very good substitute for bay leaf in culinary dishes. This myrtle has the largest leaves and flowers of all the myrtles.

**Leaf** is oval and dark green, and very aromatic when crushed

**Flower** is the largest of all the *Myrtus* species

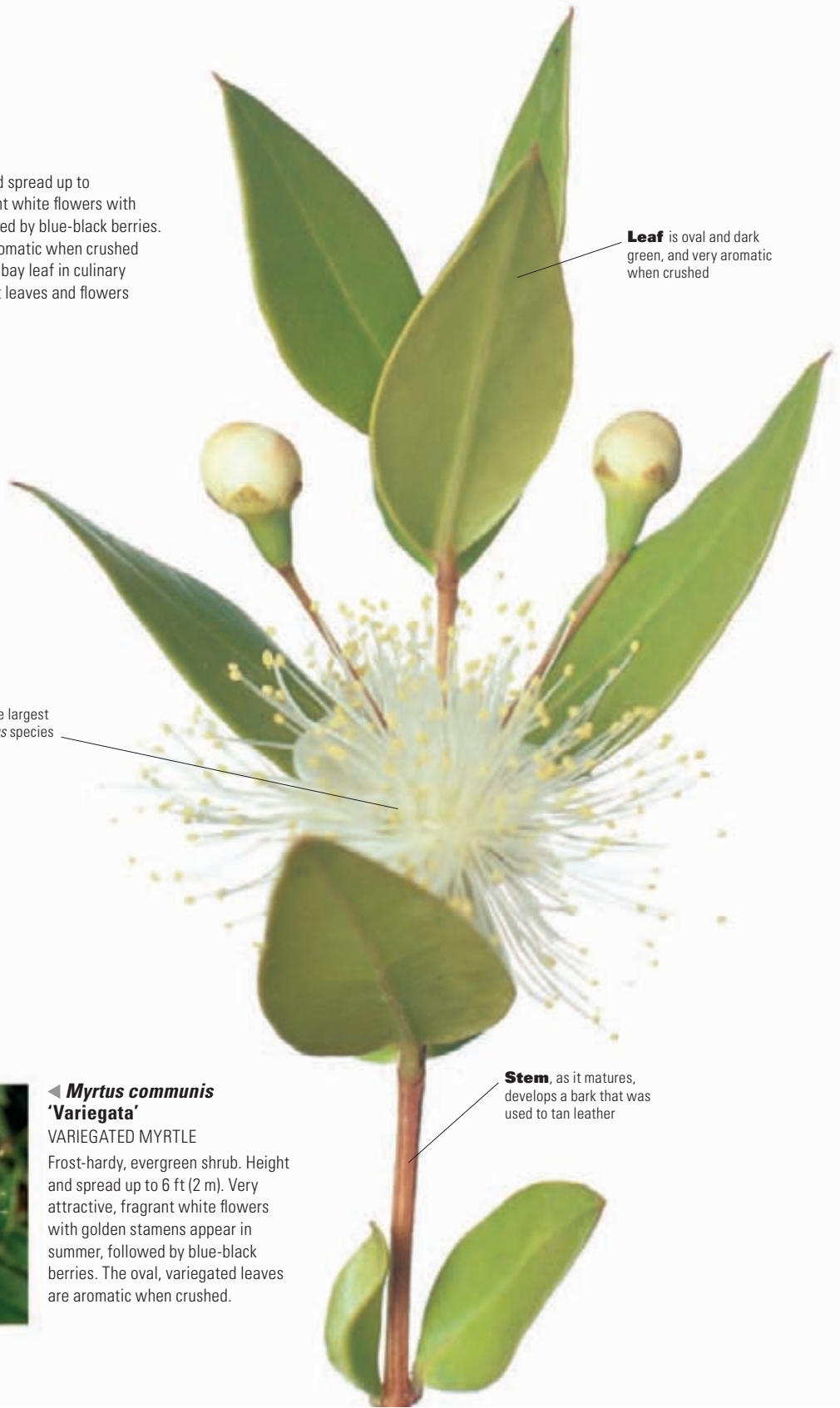


◄ ***Myrtus communis***  
**'Variegata'**

VARIEGATED MYRTLE

Frost-hardy, evergreen shrub. Height and spread up to 6 ft (2 m). Very attractive, fragrant white flowers with golden stamens appear in summer, followed by blue-black berries. The oval, variegated leaves are aromatic when crushed.

**Stem**, as it matures, develops a bark that was used to tan leather



*Nepeta*

**Catnip** LAMIACEAE

This is a well-known feline aphrodisiac. Cats have been seen to destroy a plant as they roll about in ecstasy, or to munch it to oblivion. On my farm, we named one of our cats after this herb because, as a kitten, he chewed his way through a vast number of these hallucinatory plants. Interestingly, it has a similar effect on humans and became a poor-man's substitute for cannabis in the 1960s. Catnip tea was once commonly used in Europe as a relaxing hot beverage before real tea was introduced. Medicinally, it is mainly used as a calming and sleep-inducing herbal remedy, usually taken at bedtime.

**How to grow**

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Nepeta</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring and place under protection at 65°F (18°C). Germination takes one to two weeks. In spring, propagate established plants by root division (see page 53). Avoid bruising the roots when you dig them up or you will attract cats. In summer, take cuttings from nonflowering stems.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in sun or partial shade. Catnip will adapt to most soil conditions except clay or bog. *Nepeta cataria* is a very good companion plant. If planted between brassicas, it will repel flea beetles, and will deter ants and aphids.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back hard after flowering to encourage a second flush of flowers and new growth. To protect a young plant from cats, turn a wire basket upside down over it and pin it to the ground. Encourage the plant to grow through the wire. This system allows your cat to eat some leaves without rolling in it.

**HARVESTING** In spring, pick young leaves for culinary use. When the plant is in bud, pick leaves to dry for medicinal use.

**How to use**

Young leaves have a slightly bitter, minty flavor and go well with soups and sauces. Medicinally, they are used to treat childhood ailments, such as colic, colds, and coughs. Catnip leaves can also be made into an ointment for the relief of hemorrhoids.



▲ *Nepeta x faassenii*  
CATMINT

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height and spread 18 in (45 cm). Clusters of small, lavender-blue, tubular flowers appear in summer. The oval, gray leaves are toothed and have a pungent aroma. This species of catmint has less effect on cats and no known medicinal properties.

**Flowers** are tubular and grow in clusters

**Stem** is square, ridged and slightly hairy

**Leaf** is gray-green and pungent when crushed. Recent research has shown that the dried leaf is a deterrent to cockroaches

► *Nepeta cataria*  
CATNIP, CATMINT

Hardy, herbaceous perennial. Height 3 ft (1 m), spread 2 ft (60 cm). It produces clusters of pinkish white flowers in summer that attract butterflies, especially the painted lady. The pungent, aromatic leaves are gray-green, toothed, and oval. The scent is said to repel rats.





*Nigella***Black cumin** RANUNCULACEAE

A delicate and pretty herb, *Nigella*'s black seeds were found in the Tomb of Tutankhamun. Cumin is mentioned in the Bible and has been used medicinally for thousands of years. It is also the "Muslim Miracle Herb" of which, according to an Arab proverb, it is said that "in the black seed is the medicine for every disease except death." Today, the seed of this herb is a popular spice in India, Egypt, and the Middle East. Do not confuse it with the garden plant love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*); although they look similar, love-in-a-mist has no culinary or medicinal properties.

**CAUTION** Do not take *Nigella* medicinally during pregnancy.

**How to grow**

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation |
|----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Nigella</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In early spring, grow seeds under protection at 65°F (18°C); germination usually takes one to two weeks, but it can take three to four weeks and may be erratic. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground, when the air temperature does not fall below 45°F (7°C) at night; germination takes two to three weeks. In my opinion, sowing direct into open ground gives the best crop.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in a sunny position. A better crop is achieved in open ground rather than when grown in a container.

**MAINTENANCE** A one-season crop. Prepare the site well prior to sowing. Do not feed with extra fertilizer once it has been planted.

**HARVESTING** Collect the ripe seed pods and then crush and strain their contents to separate out the black cumin seeds. The seeds are either dried and then their oil extracted, or used whole or ground for medicinal purposes or use in the kitchen.

**How to use**

The seeds have a peppery aromatic flavor. Use in bread, cakes, sauces, curries, chutneys, and fish dishes. Medicinally, seeds are used in the treatment of respiratory conditions, allergies, fevers, flu, asthma, and emphysema. Research has shown that it inhibits certain forms of cancer. Sprinkling seeds in the folds of clothes acts as a moth and insect repellent. Commercially, the seeds are ground to make cooking oil.



▲ *Nigella sativa*

BLACK CUMIN, KALONJI

Half-hardy annual. Height 12 in (30 cm) and spread 9 in (23 cm). Small, pale blue to white flowers are produced in summer, followed by distinct, hornlike seed pods, which contain black seeds. The gray-green leaves are finely serrated and divided.

*Ocimum***Basil** LAMIACEAE

A pasta or tomato dish without the aroma and taste of basil is now quite naked, since it has become an everyday herb. It is best if you can grow your own—supermarket basil is grown as a salad crop and only lasts for three to five days; it never sees the light of day or experiences the elements. Organically grown herbs raised in the garden have a much more pungent flavor, and when watered on a hot day, the aroma of the water drying on the leaf is fantastic. Basil has medicinal uses, too—in Elizabethan times, it was used as a snuff for colds, to clear the brain, and to soothe headaches.

**How to grow**

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Ocimum</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring. Cover with perlite or vermiculite (see page 44) and place under protection at 68°F (20°C). Keep watering to a minimum until germination occurs, in five to ten days. Once germinated, water sparingly to prevent seedlings from rotting. As the seedlings emerge, move the pots to a warm, light position and grow on. Plant out in the garden when all threat of frost has passed, in a sheltered position. In warmer climates, with a minimum night temperature above 55°F (13°C), sow directly into a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained fertile soil in a sunny, warm site, which offers some shelter from the midday sun. It makes an ideal pot plant, especially in cool, temperate climates. Use a soil-based substrate. Basil is a good companion plant: it repels aphids and fruit flies from other plants, as well as houseflies from the kitchen.

**MAINTENANCE** Mediterranean and Mexican basilis are slightly harder than the eastern basil, and easier to grow outside in cooler climates. They are prone to attack from slugs, aphids, and red spider mite. Always pick the growing tips to encourage bushy growth.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves throughout the growing season from the top of the plant, to encourage new growth and to use fresh or dry. Pick flowers in the summer to use fresh or preserve in butter (see page 225).

**How to use**

Add fresh, torn leaves to salads, tomatoes, and pasta dishes. The flavor may be ruined if cooked for too long. The leaves used fresh with cold food aid digestion. When rubbed onto the skin, the juice of basil leaves repels mosquitoes.



◀ *Ocimum minimum* 'Greek'  
GREEK BASIL

Tender annual. Height 9 in (23 cm) and spread 6 in (15 cm). Clusters of small, white, tubular flowers are produced in summer. The leaves are small, green, oval, and pointed. In Greece, terracotta pots of this species of basil are arranged on tables at mealtimes to keep away flies.



▲ *Ocimum basilicum* 'Cinnamon'  
CINNAMON BASIL

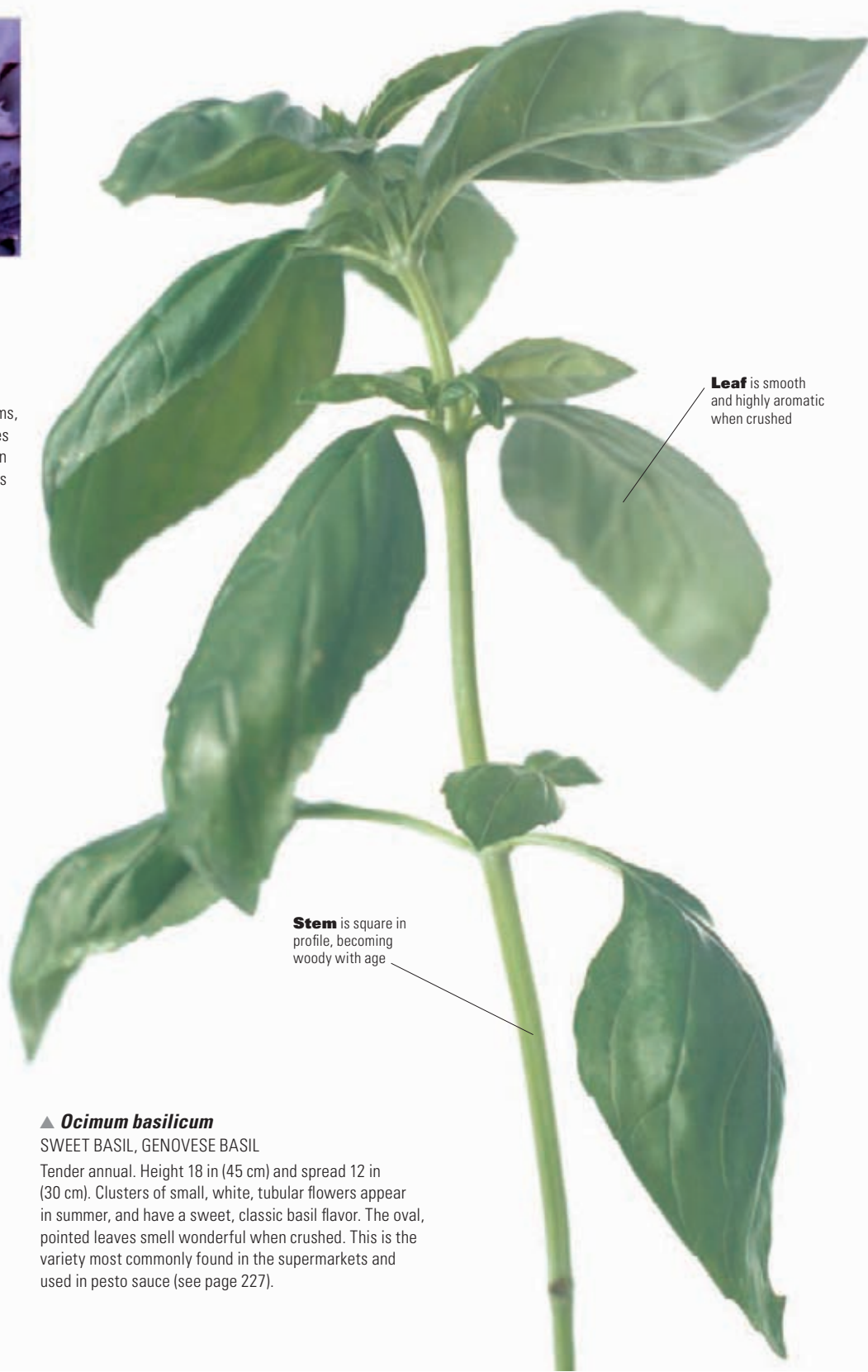
Tender annual. Height 18 in (45 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Clusters of small pink-mauve tubular flowers appear in summer. It has dark purple-brown stems and olive to green-brown, oval, pointed, and slightly serrated leaves that have a very spicy flavor. Cinnamon basil tastes particularly good in stir-fry dishes.



▲ *Ocimum basilicum* var. *purpurascens* 'Dark Opal'

DARK OPAL BASIL, PURPLE BASIL

Tender annual. Height 18 in (45 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). It has clusters of pink-mauve, tubular flowers in summer, light purple stems, and dark purple, oval, pointed leaves with a very spicy warm flavor. When added to rice and pastas, it provides a stunning color contrast.



**Leaf** is smooth and highly aromatic when crushed

**Stem** is square in profile, becoming woody with age

▲ *Ocimum basilicum*

SWEET BASIL, GENOVESE BASIL

Tender annual. Height 18 in (45 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Clusters of small, white, tubular flowers appear in summer, and have a sweet, classic basil flavor. The oval, pointed leaves smell wonderful when crushed. This is the variety most commonly found in the supermarkets and used in pesto sauce (see page 227).



*Ocimum*

# Eastern basil

LAMIACEAE

Our knowledge of culinary herbs like basil has widened with our increased interest in the cultures of countries such as India, Thailand, and Vietnam. I am particularly fascinated by the uses of basil in different societies. Holy basil (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*), for example, is one of the sacred plants of India. This strongly flavored herb plays a key role in ceremonies of worship in homes and temples; in Hindu weddings, the parents of the bride present the groom with a basil leaf. The leaves are rarely used in Indian cooking—more often, they are mixed with Indian tea leaves to make a refreshing drink.

## How to grow

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Ocimum</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring. Cover with perlite or vermiculite (see page 44) and place under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination occurs in five to ten days. Because these basil plants come from tropical climates, it is important to water in the morning, never at night, which in turn will help prevent the seedlings from damping off. Once the seedlings are large enough to handle, pot up and grow on as a potted plant. Plant in the garden or place the container outside only when the night temperature remains above 55°F (13°C).

**SITE** Basil can only be grown in the garden in warm climates and even then needs shelter from midday sun.

**MAINTENANCE** Water only in the morning. Keep picking the plant from the top to encourage it to bush out.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves and flowering tops throughout the summer to use fresh or to dry, or conserve in oil.

## How to use

In Thailand and other Asian countries, leaves are added to soups and fish dishes. The leaves are rarely used in Indian cooking. More often they are used to make herbal teas, combined with other herb seeds or simply with India tea leaves to make a refreshing drink. Medicinally, basil is used to treat bronchitis, colds, fevers, and stress. The juice of the leaves is used to alleviate skin complaints, and the essential oil is used to treat ear infections by means of drops and rubbed onto the skin as an insect repellent. Research has shown that it has the ability to reduce blood sugar levels, and it is now being used in the treatment of some types of diabetes.



▲ *Ocimum canum*  
AFRICAN BASIL

Tender annual. Height and spread 18 in (45 cm). Clusters of very pale pink-purple tubular flowers appear in summer. The mid-green leaves are oval and slightly serrated, with a hairy texture. The leaves have a strong scent, and a slightly minty aroma and flavor. African basil is used medicinally to treat persistent headache, migraine, fever, worms, and rheumatism.



▲ *Ocimum tenuiflorum* syn. *sanctum*

HOLY BASIL, TULSI

Tender annual. Height 12 in (30 cm) and spread 8 in (20 cm). Clusters of small pink-mauve tubular flowers appear in summer. The leaves are olive-green to brown-purple, oval, pointed, hairy, and slightly serrated, and have a very pungent scent and flavor. The leaves are an important component of Thai cuisine, and the plant is worshipped throughout India.



▲ *Ocimum basilicum*  
**'Horapha Nanum'**

THAI BASIL

Tender annual. Height 12 in (30 cm) and spread 8 in (20 cm). Clusters of small mulberry-purple tubular flowers appear in summer. The stem is dark purple to brown. The olive-green to purple leaves are oval in shape and slightly serrated, with a hairy texture. The fresh leaves have a strong scent and flavor and are used in Thai and Vietnamese cooking.



▲ *Ocimum* x *citriodrum*

LEMON BASIL

Tender annual. Height 12 in (30 cm) and spread 8 in (20 cm). Clusters of white, tubular flowers appear in summer. The light, bright green leaves are oval and slightly serrated, with a hairy texture. The leaves have a strong lemon scent and flavor, and are wonderful with fish, stir-fry dishes, and marinades.

*Oenothera***Evening primrose** ONAGRACEAE

The potential of this herb is enormous because all parts of the plant are edible. The value of evening primrose as a healing herb was recognized by Native Americans, who used it as a healing poultice for soothing itchy rashes and bites. The seeds contain a rich source of essential fatty acids, in which modern diets are often deficient. Oil extracted from the seeds of this plant is now used to treat medical conditions including chronic fatigue syndrome, premenstrual syndrome, hyperactivity in children, liver damage, and eczema.

**CAUTION** Do not take evening primrose if you suffer from epilepsy.

**How to grow**

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation |
|------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Oenothera</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in either spring or fall. Leave the seed uncovered by substrate and place it in a cold frame. Germination takes three to four weeks. If sowing in fall, pot up and winter the young plants in a cold frame before planting out. Alternatively, sow the seeds directly into prepared open ground in fall. Cover the soil with twigs to prevent birds from eating the seeds.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in a dry, sunny position. *Oenothera biennis* is not suited to growing in containers because it is too tall. Shorter varieties are available, such as *O. speciosa*, but this species does not have medicinal properties.

**MAINTENANCE** In the fall, cut back the flower heads before the seedpods open to prevent self-seeding. In winter, dig up the old roots of second-year growth of the biennials.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves to use fresh as required from spring until midsummer. Pick the flowers in bud or as they open throughout the summer. Dig up roots of the second-year's growth in late summer, before seeds have set—they are at their best for medicinal use at this stage. Collect seeds in early fall.

**How to use**

Add fresh young leaves to salads. Cook mature leaves like spinach. The roots have an earthy, nutty flavor, and can be cooked like parsnips. Use seeds in baking. Medicinally, the seed oil is used to treat dry skin. The leaf and stem can be infused to make an astringent facial steam.

**Flower** has four petals and is only scented in the evening, when it opens

**Leaf** is textured and lance-shaped

► ***Oenothera biennis*****EVENING PRIMROSE**

Hardy biennial. Height in the second season reaches up to 4 ft (1.2 m) and spread 3 ft (1 m). The yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers are night-scented. The flowers appear in the second season and are followed by oval, downy pods containing masses of small seeds. The green leaves are lance-shaped.



*Olea*

# Olive tree

OLEACEAE

The olive tree, with its beautiful knarled bark and twisted trunk, is as old as the hills that it grows on. In the Old Testament, the dove returned to Noah's Ark with a sprig of olive in its beak, which showed that the floodwaters were abating, and the olive branch has been the symbol of peace for centuries. The Greeks and Romans valued the oil, and the winners of the Olympic Games were crowned with its leaves. Today, olive oil and the green and ripe black fruits remain a vital ingredient of the daily diet of Mediterranean people.



**Fruit** starts off green and ripens to black. It cannot be eaten straight from the tree.

## How to grow

| Herb        | Soil | Propagation       |
|-------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Olea</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** First scarify the seed (see page 45). In early fall, sow fresh seeds and cover with coarse horticultural sand. Place under protection at 70°F (21°C) for three to four weeks. Then lower to 60°F (15°C). Germination takes from a month to a year. In summer, take cuttings from new growth, but do not let them dry out; it takes four to eight weeks for these to root. In cool climates, grow all young plants in pots under protection (cold frame, cloche, or greenhouse) for four years before planting out.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in full sun. It is a mix of wet and cold conditions, not just cold, that kills olive trees. In arid, temperate, and cold climates, grow as a container plant. Use a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** In Greece, I have seen olive plants grown as a hedge, which proves that it can be clipped. Cut back in spring. To produce a good crop of fruit, do not let the plant dry out. Feed every fall with well-rotted manure or compost. Feed container-grown plants from spring until fall with liquid seaweed. Scale insect may attack container-grown plants.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves to use fresh as required. Pick fruit when either green or black, and soak before eating.

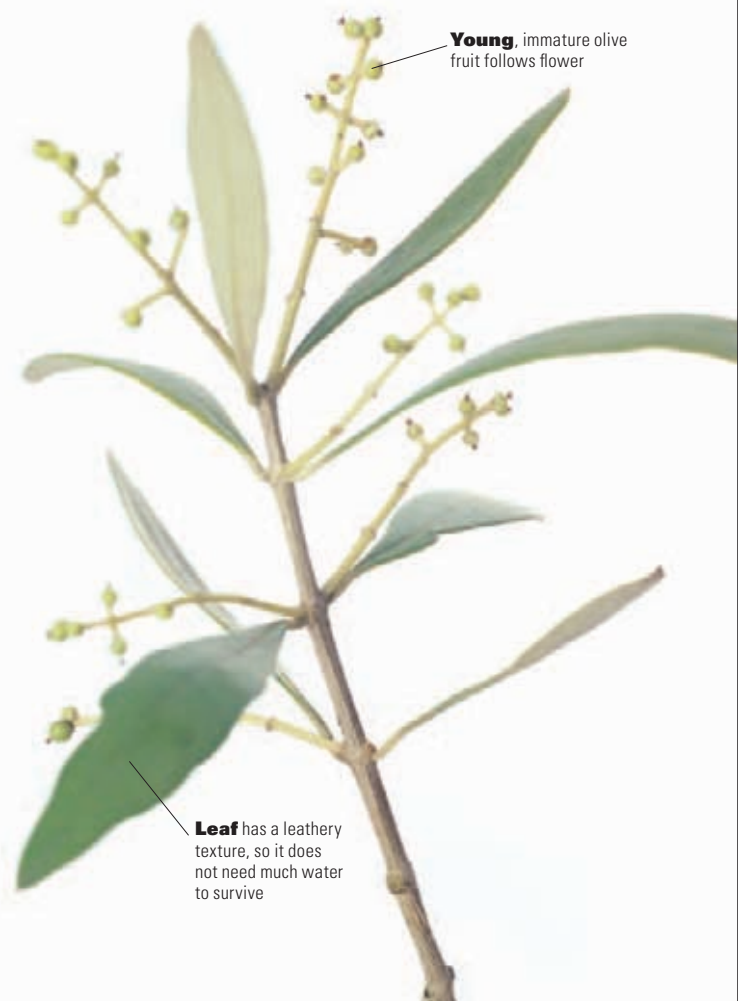
### ► *Olea europaea*

#### OLIVE TREE

Evergreen tree. Height up to 30 ft (10 m). Numerous clusters of small creamy-white fragrant flowers in early summer, followed by green olive fruits that ripen to black. The oval, gray-green leaves are leathery in texture with silvery undersides.

## How to use

To make the fruit palatable, it has to be soaked in brine, salt, or oil prior to eating. The leaves can be infused and used as an antiseptic wash for cuts and scrapes, or made into a tea to lower blood pressure and reduce nervous tension. The oil is good for circulatory diseases and helps improve digestion. Olive oil is one of the safest laxatives.



**Young**, immature olive fruit follows flower

**Leaf** has a leathery texture, so it does not need much water to survive

Origanum

Hardy oreganos LAMIACEAE

Oregano is a favorite in the kitchen. It combines particularly well with tomato dishes, pasta, meat (especially lamb), and fish. The heady aroma of this sun-loving herb fills the mountainous Mediterranean landscape, and it is credited with lifting people’s spirits. The word oregano is derived from the Greek “oros” meaning mountain and “ganos” meaning joy and beauty, hence its full meaning “joy of the mountain.” The ancient Greeks believed that wild oregano (*Origanum vulgare*) was a cure-all, including, as Aristotle suggested, an antidote for poison. Medicinally, it is probably one of the best antiseptics.

**CAUTION** Do not take medicinally during pregnancy. Do not take the essential oil internally.

How to grow

| Herb     | Soil | Propagation   |
|----------|------|---------------|
| Origanum | Sand | Seed/cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Mix the fine seed of *O. vulgare* with horticultural sand or flour to make it easier to handle. Sow in spring but do not cover the seed. Place under protection at 68°F (20°C). Germination takes ten to twenty days. The seedlings are prone to “damping off” so do not overwater. In summer, take cuttings from new growth. In warm climates, propagate established plants by division (see page 53) in spring or after flowering.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in a sunny position. The sun brings the aromatic oils up to the leaf surface and gives the plant its flavor and aroma. Oreganos attract bees and butterflies, so they are good companion plants, encouraging fertilization of vegetable crops. All oreganos grow successfully in containers using a soil-based substrate, mixed with extra sharp grit or sand.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back after flowering to encourage new growth, which will give added protection in winter. Feed once in spring, and once after cutting back, with liquid comfrey (see page 39).

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves before flowering to use fresh or to dry. After the end of summer, cut back, and use the fresh leaves immediately; fresh leaf flavor deteriorates quickly in cold climates.

How to use

Oregano and marjoram stimulate the digestive juices, helping break down rich and heavy foods. The leaves are used fresh and dried throughout the Mediterranean, with meat and other main dishes. Medicinally, oregano is antiseptic due to its high thymol oil content. It is used to treat respiratory conditions like bronchitis and asthma.



▲ *Origanum vulgare* ‘Acorn Bank’  
OREGANO ACORN BANK

Hardy herbaceous perennial, with a height and spread of 18 in (45 cm). Clusters of tiny tubular pink flowers appear in summer. The golden-yellow leaves are oval and pointed in shape, have a hairy texture, and are aromatic. In winter, the leaves die back to form a mat on the ground. Protect the plant from full sun, because these golden leaves are prone to sun scorch. This oregano variety can only be successfully grown from cuttings.

**Flower** has a classic herby flavor. Oregano flowers attract butterflies

► *Origanum vulgare*

OREGANO, WILD MARJORAM

Hardy, herbaceous perennial. Height and spread 18 in (45 cm). Clusters of tiny tubular mauve flowers appear in summer. The dark green hairy aromatic leaves die back to form a mat in winter. The vigor and flavor of this plant is affected by its planting site, and hours of sunshine.



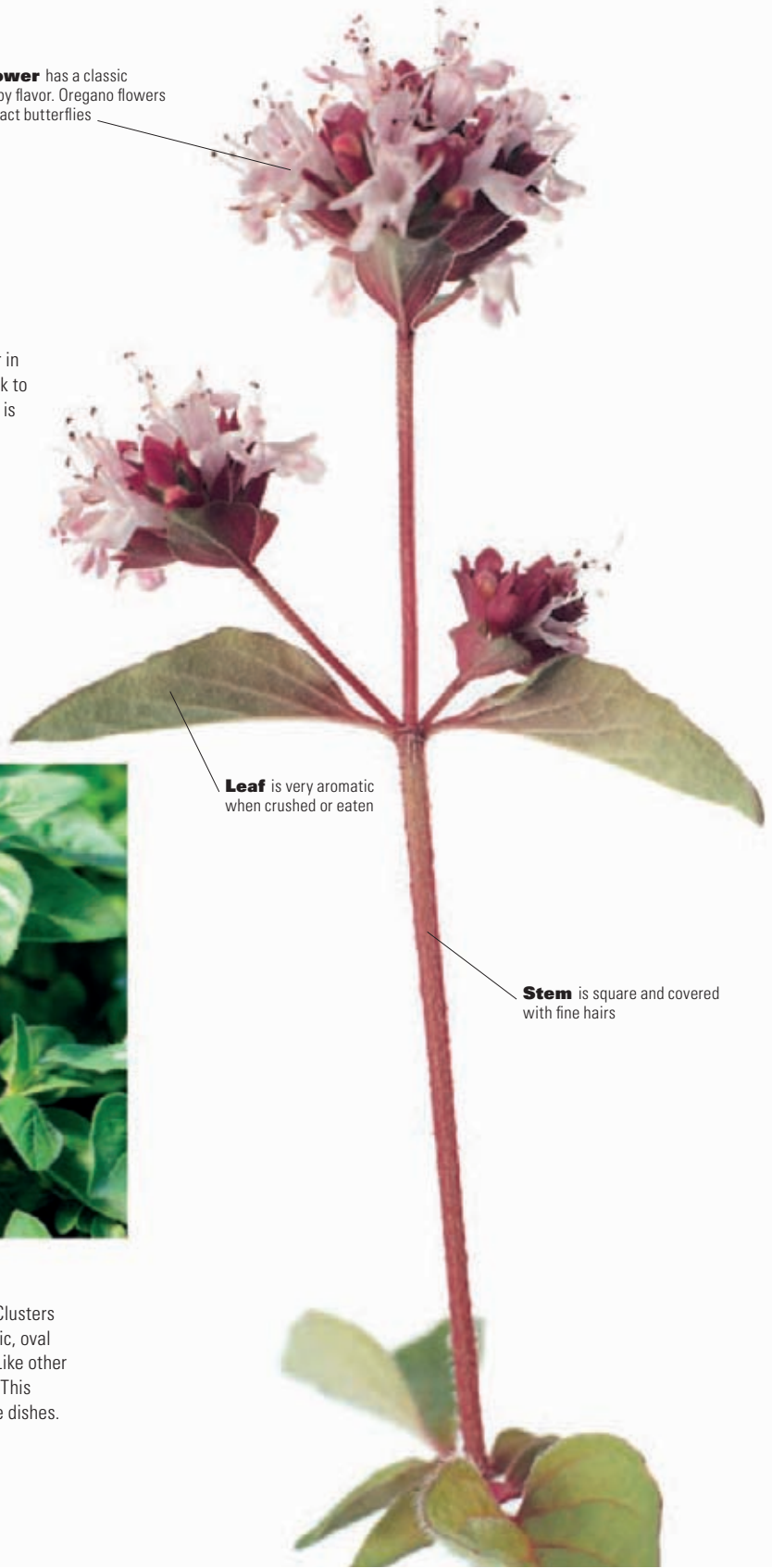
▲ *Origanum x onites*

FRENCH MARJORAM, FRENCH OREGANO

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height and spread 18 in (45 cm). Clusters of tiny tubular pale pink flowers appear in summer. The aromatic, oval leaves are green with a hint of gold, and have a hairy texture. Like other oreganos, they die back in winter to form a mat on the ground. This oregano has a light spicy flavor and tastes good with vegetable dishes. Grow from cuttings only.

**Leaf** is very aromatic when crushed or eaten

**Stem** is square and covered with fine hairs





*Origanum*

# Half-hardy oreganos LAMIACEAE

I am often asked to explain why some members of the *Origanum* family are called “oregano” and others “marjoram.” The only species to include marjoram in its Latin name is *Origanum majorana* (known commonly as sweet marjoram), so logic would suggest that it is the only true marjoram. In the rest of Europe, however, this is not the case, and several edible oreganos are called “marjoram,” so the only way to be sure is to check the Latin name. In cooking their flavor transforms an ordinary dish into a Mediterranean delight, and for personal well-being they act as a very good tonic.

**CAUTION** Do not take the essential oil of *O. majorana* internally. Do not take originums as a medicine when pregnant.

## How to grow

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation   |
|-----------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Origanum</i> | Sand | Seed/cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** See page 166 for details.

**SITE** Half-hardy oreganos are ideal for rock gardens, which simulate their native stony landscape. Plant in well-drained soil in a sunny position. *O. majorana* is a good companion plant because it deters aphids and is thought to improve the flavor of vegetables when planted between rows.

**MAINTENANCE** See page 166 for details.

**HARVESTING** See page 166 for details.

## How to use

*O. majorana* is the species of marjoram most commonly found on pizzas and added to dried herb mixtures. It is an ingredient in bouquet garni (see page 228). Medicinally, sweet marjoram tea helps ease bad colds, headaches, and insomnia, and has a calming effect on the nerves. Chewing the leaf will give temporary relief from toothache. It is also said to reduce sexual libido.



▲ *Origanum dictamnus*  
CRETAN OREGANO, DITTANY OF CRETE

Half-hardy perennial shrub. Height up to 6 in (15 cm) and spread 16 in (40 cm). The tiny pink tubular flowers are surrounded by gray-green bracts that turn pink-purple in summer as they mature. The rounded, gray-green leaves are highly aromatic, and covered with soft wooly white down. The leaves have both culinary and medicinal uses.

**Flower** grows in clusters in the shape of a knot

# ◀ *Origanum majorana*

## SWEET MARJORAM

Half-hardy perennial shrub, often grown as an annual in cool climates (because it dies in cold or wet climates in winter). Height and spread 12 in (30 cm). Tiny white tubular flowers grow around a green center. The oval, pale green leaves are very aromatic and soft to the touch. Other half-hardy species worth growing are *Origanum rotundifolium*, which has very attractive round bracts similar to *O. dictamnus*. *O.* 'Dingle Fairy' is also very attractive, with tiny flowers and interesting bracts.

**Leaf** is very soft and downy, and has a strong oval shape



*Pelargonium*

**Scented pelargoniums** GERANIACEAE

John Tradescant (d.1638), the botanist and gardener to Britain’s King Charles I, introduced the scented pelargonium to the country from its native South Africa. Unlike the true geranium, pelargoniums have relatively small, unscented flowers, but their fragrant leaves are present all year round and will exude their scent when you brush past or rub a leaf between your fingers; they can be used as natural air fresheners. The leaves are still used to make geranium essential oil, an uplifting aromatherapy oil. The scent can vary depending on species and variety, from rose or apple to mint, and, because they are very easy to hybridize, each year plants with new leaf fragrances and flavors appear.

**How to grow**

| Herb               | Soil | Propagation       |
|--------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Pelargonium</i> | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** These species can be propagated from seed. Sow in spring at 65°F (18°C) and place under protection; germination takes two to three weeks but can be erratic. A more reliable method of propagation is to take cuttings in early summer from new growth. Under protection, cuttings will take two to three weeks to root.

**SITE** In warm climates, when the night temperature does not fall below 48°F (9°C), plant in well-drained soil in a sunny position, sheltered from cold winds. In cold climates, plant in a pot and sink the pot in the garden for the growing season. Dig up the pot and bring it inside before the first frost. Scented pelargoniums also grow well as container plants, using a loam-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** In cold climates, keep watering to a minimum in winter, and move potted plants to a frost-free environment. In spring, start watering slowly. For container-grown plants, water from the top, and let the water drain through. Do not leave the plant to sit in a saucer of water. Feed weekly with comfrey liquid fertilizer (see page 39) from early spring until early fall. To maintain plant shape, nip out the growing tips. Scented pelargoniums are prone to disease, including black leg virus, gray mold, leaf gall, and rust—destroy infected plants.

**HARVESTING** In spring and summer, pick scented pelargonium leaves to use fresh, or to dry for later use.

**How to use**

Rose-scented varieties can be used to flavor stewed apples and pears, as well as jellies. Fresh leaves of fruit-scented varieties can be infused in milk, cream, syrups, desserts, custards, and ices.



▲ ***Pelargonium* ‘Lady Plymouth’**  
PELARGONIUM LADY PLYMOUTH

Half-hardy evergreen perennial. Height and spread up to 24 in (60 cm). Clusters of small pink flowers appear in summer. The gray-green and cream variegated leaves are deeply cut and smell of a mixture of rose and peppermint when rubbed or crushed.





◀ **Pelargonium 'Apple Scented'**  
APPLE-SCENTED PELARGONIUM,  
APPLE GERANIUM

A half-hardy, evergreen, trailing perennial, ideal for containers. Height up to 24 in (60 cm) and spread of 36 in (1 m). Clusters of small, white flowers appear in summer. The leaves are velvety, soft, and rounded with shallow lobes, and have an apple scent when rubbed or crushed.



◀ **Pelargonium 'Chocolate Peppermint'**  
PELARGONIUM CHOCOLATE  
PEPPERMINT

Half-hardy, evergreen perennial. Height up to 24 in (60 cm) and spread 36 in (1 m). The green and brown variegated, velvety leaves smell of peppermint with a hint of chocolate when rubbed or crushed.



**Flower** grows in small clusters

**Leaf** is covered in fine hairs. It is highly scented when crushed

**Stem** has a velvety texture

◀ **Pelargonium 'Attar of Roses'**  
PELARGONIUM ATTAR OF ROSES

Half-hardy evergreen perennial. Height up to 24 in (60 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Clusters of small, unscented pink flowers appear in summer. The mid-green, three-lobed leaves are covered with fine hairs and smell of roses when rubbed or crushed.



*Perilla*

# Shiso

LAMIACEAE

The first time I displayed purple shiso (*Perilla frutescens* var. *purpurascens*) at the Chelsea Flower Show, its striking appearance caused a storm of interest. It looks very similar to *Solenostemon*. *Perilla* is one of the few aromatic plants used in Japanese cuisine and is also an ancient ingredient of Chinese medicine, traditionally used to treat the common cold. The common name “beefsteak plant” originated in the US, and refers to the size of the purple shiso’s leaf, which looks like a large slice of raw beef. A useful culinary herb, the fresh leaf is excellent in stir-fry dishes and tempura.

**CAUTION** Can cause contact dermatitis

## How to grow

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation |
|----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Perilla</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination takes one to two weeks. Alternatively, sow in late spring in prepared open ground, when the night temperature does not fall below 45°F (8°C); germination will occur in 14–20 days.

**SITE** Plant shiso in fertile, well-drained soil that has been dug the fall before planting with well-rotted compost or leafmold. Plant in the late spring in sun or partial shade. In arid climates, irrigation is necessary. Use a soil-based substrate when growing shiso as a container plant.

**MAINTENANCE** Pinch out growing tips to maintain the plant shape and to encourage bushy growth. Feed container plants weekly with liquid comfrey (see page 39). Remove caterpillars.

**HARVESTING** Leaves can be picked at seedling stage to use as an intensely flavored cress, or when they reach maturity for a spicier flavor. Pick the flower in late summer; harvest seeds in late fall.

## How to use

Purple shiso leaf is used as a natural dye for pickling vegetables and fruit like plums, and as flavoring in tea. The flowerheads are used as a seasoning for sushi. Green leaf shiso tastes of cumin with a hint of anise and cinnamon. In Japan, green leaf shiso is bought as a vegetable. The fresh leaves are used to wrap up rice, in salads, and tempura. The seed from this variety is used as a condiment. The flowering parts contain a substance even sweeter than sugar, and are used in Japanese confectionery.



◀ *Perilla frutescens* var. *purpurascens*  
PURPLE SHISO, BEEFSTEAK PLANT  
Hardy annual. Height up to 4 ft (1.2 m) and spread 24 in (60 cm). Dark purple leaves with crinkled edges, aromatic when crushed or eaten. In plants that have been raised from seed, the flower spikes can be red and the leaf surface smoother.



▲ *Perilla frutescens*  
SHISO  
Hardy annual. Height up to 4 ft (1.2 m) and spread 24 in (60 cm). Its strongly aromatic, pointed, mid-green leaves have a purple-brown underside with toothed margins and distinct veins. Tiny, white to violet-pink flowers appear in spikes in summer, followed by pale brown nutlets. Shiso is found from the Himalayas to Japan, and is naturalized in parts of North America.

*Persicaria***Vietnamese coriander** POLYGONACEAE

It is always interesting how new varieties of herbs arrive at my farm—often by very circuitous routes. This plant was taken by some Vietnamese refugees to Australia, where it was given to a nurseryman, who in turn sent it to a friend in Britain who specialized in plants of the *Polygonaceae* family. He then gave it to me, knowing that I would be interested. It is a popular culinary herb in Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia, where it is also used medicinally. In Australia, the essential oil, called “kesom oil,” is undergoing research for use as a natural food flavoring.

**CAUTION** Do not confuse this herb with the inedible *Persicaria bistorta*.

**How to grow**

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation       |
|-------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Persicaria</i> | Sand | Cuttings/layering |

**PROPAGATION** Take cuttings in spring until late summer. Also, because plant stems that come into contact with the soil take root easily, you can propagate Vietnamese coriander by simply cutting one of these stems with roots and potting it in a mix of bark and vermiculite. In spring until late summer, you can propagate established plants by division (see page 53).

**SITE** This tropical plant will need protection when temperatures fall below 45°F (7°C) at night. In warm climates, plant in rich fertile soil in partial shade. It grows well as a potted plant in a soil-based substrate. It is a vigorous plant: repot twice a year to keep healthy.

**MAINTENANCE** Because this plant is invasive, dig up and remove any surplus roots to keep it under control. In cool climates, Vietnamese coriander may disappear if you are reorganizing the garden, so take cuttings as insurance.

**HARVESTING** Pick the leaves of Vietnamese coriander to use fresh as required throughout the growing season.

**How to use**

The baby leaves have a pungent coriander flavor, while the mature leaves have a hot, pungent, peppery flavor that can dominate. Use as a fresh leaf condiment, at the end of cooking. Important in Asian cuisines, this herb is used in noodle soups (pho) from vegetables, seafood, or meat, and also in stir-fried meat and vegetable dishes.

Medicinally, it is drunk as an infusion to ease indigestion. To get rid of dandruff, the leaves are pounded to extract the kesom oil, which is then massaged into the scalp prior to washing.

▼ *Persicaria odorata*

VIETNAMESE CORIANDER,  
RAU RAM

Tender evergreen perennial. Height 18 in (45 cm) and spread indefinite. Attractive small creamy-white flowers appear in summer, though rarely in cultivated plants, or in cold climates. The leaves are highly aromatic when crushed and have a very strong flavor.

**Leaf** has a V-shaped marking near its base

**Stem** is composed of many joints linked together by slightly bent “knots,” which is typical of the Polygonaceae family





*Petroselinum*

# Parsley

APIACEAE

This culinary delight and natural breath freshener is without doubt the best-known and most popular herb I grow. It has been cultivated for thousands of years. The ancient Greeks associated parsley with death and avoided eating it. Instead, they combined with rue (*Ruta graveolens*, see page 183), as an edging plant. The Romans used it to disguise strong odors, but believed that the seeds had to go to the devil and back seven times before it would germinate. If you follow the simple techniques outlined here, you will find that it is not as difficult to grow as past civilizations imagined.

**CAUTION** Do not take medicinally if pregnant.

## How to grow

| Herb                | Soil | Propagation |
|---------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Petroselinum</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** The secret to growing parsley successfully is to keep the temperature consistent during germination, and to keep the soil moist. Sow the seeds in early spring and place under protection at 65°F (18°C); germination takes two to four weeks. Alternatively, sow the seeds in late spring in prepared open ground when the air temperature does not fall below 45°F (7°C) at night. Water the site well prior to sowing. With this method also, germination takes two to four weeks.

**SITE** Plant in sun or partial shade in deep fertile soil that has been fed the previous fall with well-rotted manure. Ideally, the site should be sheltered from the midday sun.

**MAINTENANCE** To deter carrot-root fly, plant either chives or garlic since their scent will discourage the fly. Or use horticultural fleece or a cloche to create a protective barrier over the crop, or improvise with a cut-off plastic bottle. Young parsley plants are also prone to slug attack. Sprinkle bran around the plants to protect your crop. Do not allow plants to dry out in summer. Feed weekly with liquid comfrey feed (see page 39).

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves for culinary or medicinal use as required during the growing season.

## How to use

Parsley leaves are a key ingredient in bouquet garni (see page 228), and are widely used in cooking. Medicinally, parsley leaves are strongly diuretic, and a hair rinse made from the seeds is effective for killing head lice. Infuse one teaspoon of crushed seeds for ten minutes, strain, and use as a final rinse.

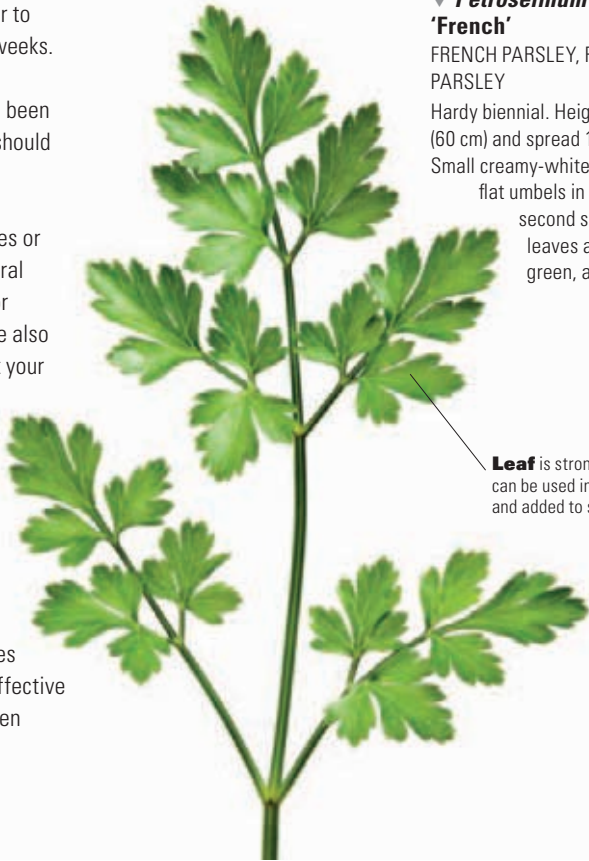


◀ *Petroselinum crispum*  
PARSLEY

Hardy biennial. Height up to 16 in (40 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Flat umbels of small, creamy-white flowers appear in the summer of the second season. The bright green leaf has a fresh, mild flavor. The leaves have a higher vitamin C content than an orange.

▼ *Petroselinum crispum*  
‘French’  
FRENCH PARSLEY, FLAT-LEAFED PARSLEY

Hardy biennial. Height up to 24 in (60 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Small creamy-white flowers grow in flat umbels in the summer of the second season. The mature leaves are flat, dark green, and divided.



**Leaf** is strongly flavored, and can be used in sauces or soups and added to salads

*Phytolacca*

# Pokeroot

PHYTOLACCACEAE

This herb is classified as a weed in the US, but in Europe it is valued as both a structural and an ornamental garden plant. It was introduced to American settlers, who knew it as “pocan” or “coccum,” from which the name “pokeroot” originated. Herbalists use it with respect. It is currently being researched for its ability to stem the debilitating tropical disease bilharzia (carried by water snails) because the plant root is known to destroy snails. Traditionally, the young shoots of pokeroot were considered a wonderful culinary delicacy, but prepared incorrectly this plant is poisonous.



**Berries** are toxic to humans, but will attract birds to the garden.

## How to grow

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Phytolacca</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** In the fall, separate the seed from the flesh (see page 70) and either sow at once or the following spring (store seed in the refrigerator or in a cold, dry place). Sow into a pot, cover with coarse horticultural sand, and place in a cold frame; germination takes three to four weeks. In winter, protect fall-sown seedlings in the cold frame. In either spring or fall, propagate established plants by division (see page 53), replanting in a well-prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in fertile, moist soil, in sun or partial shade.

**MAINTENANCE** To prevent the plant from producing berries and self-seeding, cut off the flowers just after flowering.

**HARVESTING** Only pick fresh young leaves for cooking because mature leaves are toxic. In the fall, pick ripe berries to use medicinally or as a natural dye. For medicinal use, dig up the root of two-year-old plants in the fall.

## How to use

The young leaves can be eaten like spinach, but must be boiled for 30 minutes in at least two changes of water before they are safe to eat. Eat with care. Medicinally, this herb should be taken only under professional supervision. It is used to treat chronic infections and as a poultice or ointment is used for fungal infections and scabies. A crimson textile dye can be made from ripe berries.

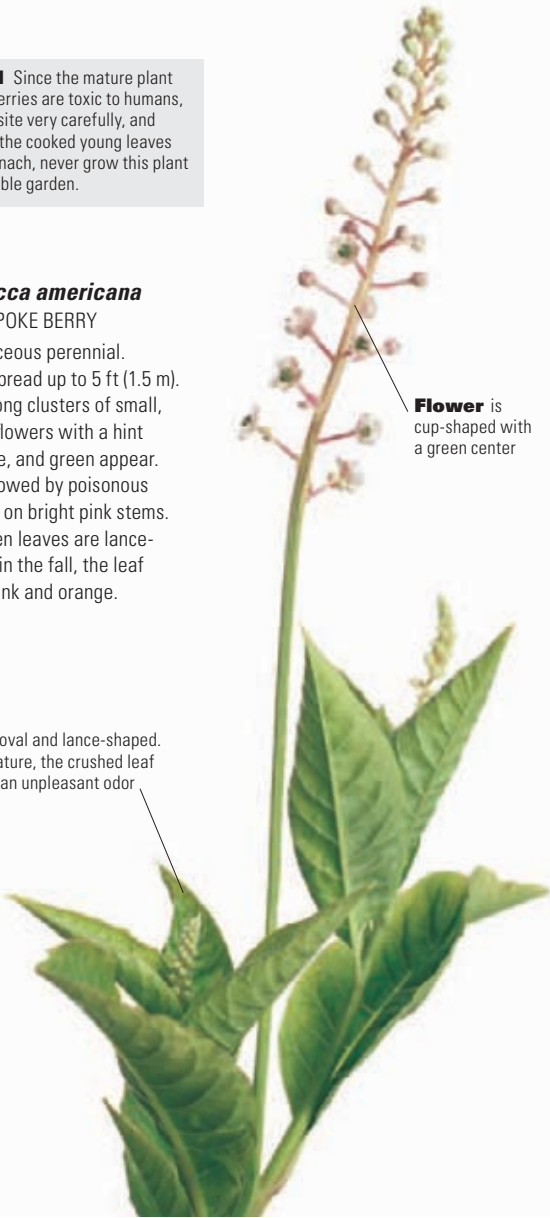
**CAUTION** Since the mature plant leaves and berries are toxic to humans, choose your site very carefully, and even though the cooked young leaves taste like spinach, never grow this plant in the vegetable garden.

### ► *Phytolacca americana* POKEROOT, POKE BERRY

Hardy herbaceous perennial.  
Height and spread up to 5 ft (1.5 m).  
In summer, long clusters of small, cup-shaped flowers with a hint of pink, white, and green appear. They are followed by poisonous black berries on bright pink stems. The mid-green leaves are lance-shaped, and in the fall, the leaf edges turn pink and orange.

**Leaf** is oval and lance-shaped. When mature, the crushed leaf releases an unpleasant odor

**Flower** is cup-shaped with a green center



Portulaca

Purslane PORTULACACEAE

This herb has been grown for thousands of years as a vegetable and as a medicinal herb. It was popular in England in the reign of Elizabeth I, but it is no longer fashionable as a culinary herb in Britain, even though it is a popular salad herb in Europe and Asia, where it is also cooked as a vegetable. Research has shown that purslane contains a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, which help maintain a healthy heart and strengthen the immune system. Personally, I love the taste of this herb, and often eat fresh purslane leaves straight from the garden.

**CAUTION** Do not take medicinally when pregnant.

How to grow

| Herb      | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------|------|-------------|
| Portulaca | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring and place under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination takes one to two weeks. Alternatively, sow into a prepared site in late summer, when the night temperature does not fall below 50°F (10°C).

**SITE** Purslane will grow anywhere in light soil in temperate climates, but in cool and cold climates, sow each year in a well-drained, fertile soil in a sunny site. Plant into soil that has been fed with well-rotted manure in the fall prior to planting—there is no need to feed again. It will grow in containers in a soil-based substrate mixed with a small amount of sharp grit for extra drainage.

**MAINTENANCE** Cover seedlings with horticultural fleece to deter pests like flea beetles and check regularly for slugs, which adore young plants. It does not require feeding, but water regularly to prevent the soil from drying out during summer months. However, avoid over-watering; this plant does not like to sit in water.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves, stems, and flower buds to use fresh throughout the growing season.

How to use

The leaves, stems, and flower buds of purslane can be eaten raw in salads or cooked as a vegetable. It is a good source of vitamins A, B, and C, and calcium. In the Middle East, it is often pickled in vinegar. The World Health Organization has included *Portulaca oleracea* in its list of most-used medicinal plants; it is a natural diuretic, and is used to clear toxins from the body and lower fevers. It also helps build up the immune system.

▼ *Portulaca oleracea*

PURSLANE, PIG WEED

Hardy annual. Height up to 18 in (45 cm) and spread 24 in (60 cm). Its small yellow flowers open in the summer sun and close in the shade. It has thick, fleshy, spoon-shaped, mid-green leaves, which taste like a succulent version of snow peas.

**Leaves** are fleshy, and the juice is soothing when applied to insect bites and burns. It also soothes eczema

**Stem** is edible. Cut into bite-sized chunks to add crunch to salads





Primula

Primrose PRIMULACEAE

This pretty yellow flower with its delicate scent heralds the arrival of spring. It is the flower of my childhood: I used to pick tiny bunches of primroses from the garden at Easter, tie them up with yarn, and give them to my mother as a gift. Surprisingly, primroses are classified as an herb because the flowers possess useful medicinal properties. They were traditionally used to treat gout, respiratory tract infections, insomnia, and anxiety. The flowers and young leaves also have a good flavor and make an attractive addition to salads.

**CAUTION** Do not take medicinally when pregnant.

How to grow

| Herb    | Soil | Propagation |
|---------|------|-------------|
| Primula | Loam | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** It is important to use fresh seed. Sow in late summer and place in a cold frame; germination takes two to three weeks. Winter the young plants in the cold frame, planting out into a prepared site the following spring. It may not flower in the first season. In fall, propagate established plants by division (see page 53).

**SITE** Plant in moist soil in semi-shade. In the wild, primroses thrive on west-facing banks, close to deciduous hedges and trees. Bear this natural habitat in mind when choosing a site in the garden. Primroses grow well in containers or as house plants, using a soil-based substrate. Outside, shelter the container from the midday sun; indoors, keep it away from radiators.

**MAINTENANCE** All primulas need to be divided in the fall to keep the plant healthy. Division also protects pot-grown plants from attack by vine weevil.

**HARVESTING** In the fall, dig up the roots of three- to four-year-old plants to dry for medicinal use. In spring, pick flowers and leaves to use fresh in salads or to dry for medicinal use.

How to use

Add flowers and young leaves to salads or desserts. Medicinally, the flowers, leaves, and roots are used to treat respiratory tract infections, insomnia, and anxiety. The flowers are used in infusion ointments and tinctures to treat minor wounds. Do not take medicinally when pregnant, or if on anticoagulant drugs, or if allergic to aspirin.



▲ *Primula vulgaris*  
PRIMROSE, FIRST ROSE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height and spread 6 in (15 cm). Sweetly scented, pale yellow flowers with a deep yellow center appear in spring. The stems are covered with fine hairs. The mid-green, oval-shaped leaves are textured. The primrose has become increasingly rare in the countryside. It is now illegal to dig up plants growing in the wild anywhere in Britain.

*Prostanthera*

# Australian mint bush LAMIACEAE

This native Australian herb is quite stunning when in flower, and I defy anyone not to want to try growing it in their garden. Historically, it was used by the Aborigines to treat chest complaints. The leaves are now used to make an essential oil that is beneficial for treating stress and tension; the leaves also have both antibacterial and antifungal properties. The fresh leaves work as a decongestant: simply place them in a bowl, pour boiling water over them, place a towel over your head, and inhale the steam. Remedies made from this herb should only be used externally.

## How to grow

| Herb                | Soil | Propagation       |
|---------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Prostanthera</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** I have not known *Prostanthera* to set seed in Britain. After many trials, I have found it is best to propagate from cuttings taken from the current year's growth in late fall or winter. Once rooted, restrict watering to the minimum possible, and keep plants in a frostfree environment over the winter. Pot up plants in the spring and then grow on in pots, protecting young plants from winter frost for a further two years before planting out.

**SITE** This alpine plant favors very free-draining soil and a sunny site. It prefers neutral to slightly acid soil. It grows well in containers using a peat-based substrate, mixed with extra grit for drainage.

**MAINTENANCE** Do not overfeed this herb; otherwise, it will not flower—feed container-grown plants only once a month. Feed plants outside in the fall with leaf mold. It dislikes wet and damp conditions, so from fall on, cut down on watering, but do not let the substrate dry out. In early spring, slowly reintroduce weekly watering, depending on the weather. Container-grown plants are prone to sudden die-back. If a branch changes color from green to brown, cut it back to the main stem, and burn the diseased branches.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves in summer to make infusions and oils.

## How to use

An essential oil from the leaves of the Australian mint bush is used externally to alleviate tension and to release emotional exhaustion. Rub the essential oil into the temples to ease headaches. It can also be applied to the skin as a mosquito repellent. Mix a few drops with almond oil for massage.



▲ *Prostanthera lasianthos*  
VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS BUSH  
A frost-hardy, evergreen, large shrub. Height 3–18 ft (1–6 m) and spread of 3 ft (1 m). It has attractive, white, bell-shaped flowers with tiny purple spots in late summer. Its leaves are mid-green, long, spear-shaped, and mint-scented.



▲ ***Prostanthera ovalifolia***

AUSTRALIAN OVAL-LEAVED  
MINT BUSH

Frost-hardy, evergreen shrub. Height and spread 5 ft (1.2 m). Profuse sprays of small, bell-shaped, purple flowers on short, leafy racemes appear in the spring and early summer. Leaves are dark green, oval, and mint-scented. The plant can only withstand a minimum temperature of 41°F (5°C).



**Flower** has distinct  
purple spots on the throat

**Leaf** has a shiny,  
leatherlike texture

► ***Prostanthera cuneata***

AUSTRALIAN MINT BUSH, ALPINE MINT BUSH

Hardy evergreen shrub. Height 3 ft (90 cm) and spread 2 ft (60 cm). It has attractive white bell-shaped flowers with purple spots running down the flower's throat. Each flower occurs singly, close to the end of a branch. The flowers appear from late spring until early summer. The small, dark green leaves are round with a wavy edge. When crushed, the leaves release a strong mint scent.



*Rosmarinus*

# Rosemary

LAMIACEAE

If I had to choose one culinary herb to take with me onto a desert island, it would be rosemary. It is one of the most versatile and useful herbs in the kitchen, in the home, and medicinally. It is associated with remembrance and, for hundreds of years, it was used to improve the memory. Currently, it is being tested in the treatment of senile dementia. There are many lovely stories associated with it; one of my favorites is about the Virgin Mary, who is said to have thrown her blue cloak over a rosemary bush during her flight into Egypt, which turned its white flowers blue.

**CAUTION** The essential oil should only be taken externally. Excessive doses of rosemary leaf may cause convulsions.

## How to grow

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation       |
|-------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Rosmarinus</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring under protection at 70°F (21°C); germination takes one to two weeks. After germination, do not overwater; the seedlings are prone to “damping off” (see page 54). Alternatively, you can take cuttings of new growth in summer after flowering. Pot up when well rooted, and grow on under cold protection for one season before planting out. In spring or fall, rosemary can also be propagated by layering (see page 51). This is relatively simple because plants often have branches that hang down to the ground.

**SITE** Plant in a warm, sunny site in well-drained, acid-free soil. This herb grows well in containers. Use a loam-based substrate and protect plants from wet or cold in winter.

**MAINTENANCE** Rosemary can, in temperate climates, be grown successfully as a hedge. Cut back after flowering in late spring. This plant is prone to a die-back virus. Immediately cut the infected branch off to the main stem, and burn; do not compost the branch. Act quickly, or the whole bush will die.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves from this evergreen herb throughout the year.

## How to use

Rosemary leaf has many culinary uses (see page 218). Medicinally, it alleviates hangovers and restores the memory, and aids recovery from long-term stress and chronic illness. The essential oil is a good insect repellent, and can be rubbed onto the temples to alleviate headaches.



▲ *Rosmarinus officinalis* ‘Roseus’  
PINK ROSEMARY

Hardy perennial evergreen. Height and spread 32 in (80 cm). Small pale pink flowers appear in early spring and last until early summer, with, occasionally, a second flush in early fall. It has short, needle-shaped, bright green leaves, with lighter undersides. The leaves are highly aromatic when crushed.



▲ *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Green Ginger'

GINGER ROSEMARY

Hardy perennial evergreen. Height and spread 24 in (60 cm). Small, pale blue flowers with a dark center appear in early spring and last until early summer with, occasionally, a second flush in early fall. It has short, fine, needle-shaped, mid-green leaves, which are highly aromatic with a hint of ginger when crushed.



▲ *Rosmarinus officinalis*  
Prostratus Group 'Capri'

ROSEMARY CAPRI

Hardy perennial evergreen. Height 6 in (15 cm) and spread 3 ft (1 m). Small, light blue flowers appear in early spring and last until early summer, with, occasionally, a second flush in early fall. The leaves are needle-shaped, and dark green, and highly aromatic when crushed.



▲ *Rosmarinus officinalis*

ROSEMARY

Hardy perennial evergreen. Height and spread 3 ft (1 m). Small, pale blue flowers appear in early spring and last until early summer, with, occasionally, a second flush in early fall. The short, needle-shaped, dark green leaves are highly aromatic. This is an important culinary and medicinal herb.

*Rumex*

**Buckler leaf sorrel** POLYGONACEAE

This sour but refreshing herb takes its name from the old French word “surelle” (meaning sour). The ancient Egyptians and ancient Romans ate sorrel to counteract rich foods, and in 15th-century England, it was considered one of the finest vegetables. I am also of the opinion that it is a wonderful herb to use in hot and cold sauces and soups, while the young leaves can add a lemony or fresh apple flavor to summer salads. Medicinally, it is a useful first-aid herb to relieve the unpleasantness of sunburn—try bathing the affected skin with a cooled infusion made from the leaves.

**How to grow**

| Herb         | Soil | Propagation |
|--------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Rumex</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring and place under protection at 60°F (15°C); germination takes five to ten days. Alternatively, in late spring, sow seeds thinly into prepared open ground, when the air temperature does not fall below 45°F (7°C) at night; germination takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 12 in (30 cm) apart. Divide established plants in fall.

**SITE** Plant in rich, fertile acid soil that has been fed with well-rotted manure in the fall before planting. Plants prefer sites shaded from the midday sun. French sorrel grows well in large containers. Use an ericaceous substrate and keep it out of the midday sun.

**MAINTENANCE** The leaf flavor is best when the plant grows in cool soil. To prevent the leaves from becoming bitter in the summer months when the soil is warm, use a leaf or bark mulch (see page 36) to reduce soil temperature. Dry soil also impairs the leaf flavor, so keep the plants well watered. In the fall, feed around established plants with well-rotted manure. Feed container plants regularly throughout the growing season with liquid comfrey (see page 39). If plants become invasive, add lime to the soil to discourage growth.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves of buckler leaf sorrel to use fresh throughout the growing season.

**How to use**

Eating buckler leaf sorrel in salads is thought to cleanse the blood and improve the hemoglobin content. Avoid overeating it while breastfeeding, and do not take it if you have a tendency to develop kidney stones. The fresh leaves can also be used as a poultice to treat boils and acne.



▲ *Rumex scutatus*

BUCKLER LEAF SORREL, FRENCH SORREL

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 18 in (45 cm) and spread 24 in (60 cm). It has small, inconspicuous green flowers that turn brown as seeds ripen. Its squat, shield-shaped leaves taste similar to crunchy green apples and can be eaten fresh or cooked. Crushed leaves are good for removing ink stains or rust marks from clothes and furniture.



*Ruta*

# Rue

RUTACEAE

Rue has had some bad publicity because, when the skin brushes against the leaves in certain weather conditions, it can cause phytol-photodermatitis (skin burn). However, it is highly beneficial medicinally and is used in a number of homeopathic remedies. It also makes an attractive addition to the garden when planted in a carefully chosen site. To the Greeks and the Romans, it was considered the herb of grace, and all brides traditionally carried a sprig in their bouquet. It was also used as an antidote to snake venom and poisonous toadstools, and was thought to help preserve eyesight.

**CAUTION** If brushed against, rue can cause phytol-photodermatitis (skin burn)—take care in the garden.

## How to grow

| Herb        | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Ruta</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring and place under protection at 65°F (18°C); germination takes one to two weeks. After germination, take care not to overwater because the seedlings are prone to “damping off” (see page 54). Take cuttings from new growth in late spring or early summer. Do not overwater; cuttings are prone to rot in damp conditions.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained, poor soil. Choose a sunny position in the middle or back of a border where it will not be disturbed by passersby.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back to maintain the plant’s shape. Do this when the plant is dry, and wear gloves and cover your arms and legs to avoid being burned. Rue is prone to whitefly, followed by a black sooty mold. Use horticultural soap, following manufacturer’s instructions as soon as the pest appears on the plant. This soap will also control mold.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves of the rue plant to use fresh or to dry for medicinal use as required.

## How to use

This herb can be used in the kitchen, but is very bitter. A tastier culinary species is Egyptian rue (*Ruta chalapensis*). Medicinally, rue was traditionally used for reducing blood pressure. It is still used in Mediterranean regions to stimulate the onset of menstruation. In homeopathy, rue is used to treat back pain, sciatica, strained muscles, tennis elbow, and eyestrain—consult a fully trained herbalist or physician for advice and guidance on using rue as an herbal remedy at home. In the home, dried rue, if strategically placed, will deter ants, and will also deter flies if added to floral displays.



▲ *Ruta graveolens*

RUE

Hardy evergreen shrub. Height and spread 24 in (60 cm). Small, yellow, waxy flowers with four or five petals in summer. The green-blue leaves are divided into small, rounded, oval lobes and have an unusual musky scent that is hard to describe. To avoid skin burn, take care not to brush against the leaves when they are wet after rain or watering, or when they are in sunlight.

Salvia

Sage LAMIACEAE

This Mediterranean herb has been in use for thousands of years. I never cease to be amazed by its healing and culinary properties. It was used to preserve meat, as an antiseptic, and as a cure for snakebite. Modern research has shown that it arrests the aging process, and it is being tested as a treatment for Alzheimer's. In addition, sage makes an attractive garden plant. The foliage presents a soft backdrop of gray-green, which sets off its pretty blue flowers in summer. Sage flowers are also very good for attracting butterflies and bees to the garden throughout the summer months.

**CAUTION** Overuse of sage can have potentially toxic effects.

How to grow

| Herb   | Soil | Propagation   |
|--------|------|---------------|
| Salvia | Sand | Seed/cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring, under cover at 65°F (18°C); germination takes one to two weeks. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into open ground, when the air temperature at night remains above 45°F (7°C); germination takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 12 in (30 cm) apart. Protect young plants for the first winter. Take cuttings (see page 50) from perennial salvias in late spring to early summer. Propagate established woody plants by layering in either spring or fall (see page 51).

**SITE** Plant in a warm, sunny site in well-drained, acid-free soil. Hardy sages grow well in containers. Use a soil-based substrate and protect from wet or cold in winter.

**MAINTENANCE** Prune lightly in spring to encourage young shoots for strong leaf flavor, and again after flowering in late summer. Clear away dead leaves from under the plant in spring to prevent mildew in damp weather. To sustain leaf flavor, replace the plant entirely every four to seven years.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves throughout the year. In spring (before the plant flowers), the leaves have a mild, warm flavor. After flowering, they have a stronger, tannin flavor.

► **Salvia officinalis Purpurascens Group**  
PURPLE SAGE, RED SAGE

Hardy perennial evergreen. Height and spread 28 in (70 cm). Grow from cuttings. Mauve-blue flowers appear in summer. The aromatic oval leaves are a mix of purple-red-gray colors, and have a soft texture. They have a mild flavor and combine well with vegetable dishes.

How to use

Before cooking, quickly immerse sage leaves in hot water to bring the leaf oils to the surface and enhance the flavor. Sage is known to be antiseptic, astringent, carminative, antispasmodic, and a systemic antibiotic. It is used to treat sore throats (as a gargle), poor digestion, hormonal problems, and to stimulate the brain.



► ***Salvia lavandulifolia***

NARROW-LEAVED SAGE,  
SPANISH SAGE

Hardy perennial evergreen. Height and spread 18 in (45 cm). Grow from cuttings. Attractive blue flowers appear in summer. The leaves are small, narrow, oval, textured, and highly aromatic, with an excellent strong culinary flavor. The leaves make a stimulating infusion. This sage is ideal for growing in containers.

**Flower** petals form a protruding lower lip, which is characteristic of the Lamiaceae family

**Stem** is square in profile—a distinguishing feature of this plant family



**Leaf** is highly aromatic, velvet-textured, and feels raised to the touch

► ***Salvia officinalis***

COMMON SAGE, GARDEN SAGE,  
SAWGE

Hardy perennial evergreen. Height and spread 2 ft (60 cm). It has highly aromatic, oval, green-gray textured leaves and mauve-blue flowers in summer. This is the standard culinary and medicinal sage. Types of sage with variegated leaves do not have such a strong flavor and are less potent medicinally.





Salvia

# Aromatic sages

LAMIACEAE

The genus *Salvia* includes over 900 species of aromatic annuals, biennials, and perennials, as well as evergreen shrubs. They are available in a choice of different colors and leaf fragrances, which gives them a special appeal. I am still amazed when crushing the leaf of pineapple sage (*Salvia* ‘Scarlet Pineapple’) by its distinct scent of fresh ripe pineapple. Many of the aromatic sages are winter hardy; those that are not are so beautiful that it is worth creating space in a conservatory or greenhouse to keep them in favorable conditions over the winter months.

## How to grow

| Herb   | Soil | Propagation |
|--------|------|-------------|
| Salvia | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring under cover at 65°F (18°C); germination takes one to two weeks. Alternatively, sow seeds in late spring into prepared open ground, when the air temperature remains above 45°F (7°C) at night; germination takes two to three weeks. Thin seedlings to 8 in (20 cm) apart. *S. clevelandii* can only be grown from seed in warm climates. In late spring to early summer, you can take cuttings (see page 50) from the perennial species.

**SITE** Plant in a warm, sunny site in well-drained, acid-free soil. Half-hardy salvias will only tolerate outdoor night temperatures above 50°F (10°C). They grow well in containers using a soil-based substrate. In winter, keep watering to a minimum because wet conditions kill them quicker than cold.

**MAINTENANCE** Prune lightly in spring to encourage young shoots for a strong leaf flavor, and again after flowering in late summer. In the fall, collect the seeds from *S. viridis* and then remove this annual, digging over the patch. Before the first frost, lift half-hardy perennial salvia species, cut back flowering shoots, and pot up using a soil-based substrate. Protect in a greenhouse over the winter.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves from evergreen sages as required. For drying, harvest leaves before flowering. Pick flowers as they open to use fresh or to dry.

## How to use

The cooking process destroys the flavor of aromatic sage leaves, so only add leaves to dishes right at the end. Because the leaf flavors are strong, only use a small amount to start with.



▲ *Salvia viridis* syn. *S. horminum*

PAINTED SAGE, RED-TOPPED SAGE

Hardy annual. Height 18 in (45 cm), spread 8 in (20 cm). Small purple and white or pure white flowers, which are dominated by a series of colorful leaf bracts in shades of purple, pink, blue, and white, which look like flower petals except that they are often marked with green veins. These colorful leaf bracts last all summer. The true green leaves are downy, rough-textured, and aromatic.



▲ ***Salvia clevelandii***

JIM SAGE, CLEVELAND SAGE

Half-hardy shrub. Height up to 5 ft (1.5 m) and spread 3 ft (90 cm). Oval, wrinkled green, slightly sticky aromatic leaves. Beautiful blue flowering spikes in summer. The smell of this sage is the aroma of the California chaparral. Grow in very well-drained gravelly soil. Cut back one-third of growth in the fall, and a further third in winter, leaving a third for the following season.



◀ ***Salvia microphylla* var. *microphylla* syn. *S. grahamii***

BLACK CURRANT-SCENTED SAGE

Half-hardy perennial evergreen. Height and spread up to 4 ft (1.2 m). Lovely raspberry-colored flowers with a characteristic lower lip that appear in late summer until early fall. Oval mid-green leaves smell of black currants when rubbed between the fingertips.



**Flower** is narrow and trumpet-shaped with a protruding lower lip

▲ ***Salvia elegans* 'Scarlet pineapple'**

PINEAPPLE SAGE

Half-hardy perennial. Height 3 ft (90 cm), spread 2 ft (60 cm). Stunning trumpet-shaped red flowers appear from midsummer until early fall. The oval, pointed green leaves have a slight red-brown tinge at the edges and a wonderful pineapple scent when crushed or rubbed between the fingertips.

*Sambucus*

# Elder

CAPRIFOLIACEAE

This herb was once regarded as one of the most magically powerful plants and offered protection against evil spirits. It is a truly useful herb—all parts of the plant have been exploited to make everything from wine to a musical instrument. It has many culinary and medicinal uses, and research shows that it can aid recovery from colds and flu. The berries are also a good source of vitamin A and C, but require cooking before eating to avoid stomach upsets. The leaves smell unpleasant when crushed and are poisonous, but they can be used in the organic garden to make a potent caterpillar or fly repellent.



**Berries** must be cooked before eating. They are a good source of vitamins A and C.

## How to grow

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation       |
|-----------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Sambucus</i> | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** In late summer, separate the seed from the pulp and sow fresh. Cover the seed with coarse horticultural sand. In cold climates, place the potted seed outside to stratify it. Alternatively, mix the seed with sand in a glass jar and place in the refrigerator for 4 weeks before sowing; germination takes four to six months. For the first winter, keep young plants in pots in a cold frame before planting out the following spring. Take cuttings from new growth in late summer.

**SITE** Plant in fertile, moist soil in sun or dappled shade. Elder can grow up to 4 ft (1.2 m) in one season.

**MAINTENANCE** To maintain a good shape and to keep rapid growth in check, prune back hard every three years during the fall. Elder is not suitable for growing in containers—it becomes too large.

**HARVESTING** Pick the flowers in the spring just before they open fully. Gather berries in early fall.

## How to use

Fresh flowers are used to make elderflower cordial (see page 220). Medicinally, the flowers are used to treat coughs, colds, allergies, and arthritis. They are also used in skin lotions. The berries are mildly laxative and should only be eaten cooked in sauces, syrups, and pies. Elder spray is effective against aphids, caterpillars, carrot-root fly, and root maggots. Simmer 1 lb (500 g) leaves in 1 quart (1 liter) of water for 30 minutes, strain then dilute with another quart (liter) of water. (Do not use the same pan for food.) Apply by spray. All plant parts contain colored pigment and can be used as natural plant dyes.

### ▼ *Sambucus nigra*

ELDER, COMMON ELDER, BLACK ELDER

Hardy deciduous shrub. Height up to 20 ft (6m). Attractive, flat heads of lightly scented, creamy-white, star-shaped flowers appear in the summer and are followed by masses of small, round, black fruits. Its large leaves are made up of green, saw-edged leaflets.



**Flower** grows in large, flat clusters and has a sweet perfume

**Leaves** are large and serrated



*Sanguisorba*

# Salad burnet

ROSACEAE

Traditionally, this pretty herb was infused in a drinking cup of wine or beer as a cure for gout and rheumatism. The soft green leaves are deceptive because salad burnet is an evergreen plant that survives winter conditions. Even in hard winters, salad burnet leaves will die back for only a short time before reappearing in early spring. This hardy nature makes salad burnet a useful herb to grow in the kitchen garden. It can be harvested throughout the winter when most other green salad leaves have died back, and can be used as a substitute for parsley when it is out of season.

## How to grow

| Herb               | Soil | Propagation   |
|--------------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Sanguisorba</i> | Sand | Seed/division |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seeds in the fall. Cover with perlite or vermiculite (see page 44), and place in a cold frame; germination takes two to three weeks. Winter young plants in a cold frame. Alternatively, sow seeds in early spring, cover with perlite or vermiculite, and place under protection at 65°F (18°C); germination takes two to four weeks. Divide established plants in the fall, replanting in a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in sun or partial shade. In traditional herb gardens, salad burnet was often mixed with thyme and planted next to paths to perfume the air. This is a good system to follow, since paths give the gardener easy access to the plant, especially in winter. Alternatively, grow salad burnet in containers close to the house using a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** In hot weather, the leaves become bitter as the sun brings tannin to the surface. Trim the bush to keep it compact, and to inhibit flowering. Cutting back will also promote new, tender growth. For plants in containers, water regularly in the growing season, and feed once a week with liquid comfrey fertilizer (see page 39).

**HARVESTING** Pick the fresh young leaves as required.

## How to use

Salad burnet, as its name suggests, tastes good in salads. The leaf has a nutty, dry cucumber flavor, which also works well in sauces for grilled or poached fish. The young leaves can also be used in winter dishes as a substitute for parsley when it is out of season. Medicinally, chewing young salad burnet leaves aids digestion.



► *Sanguisorba minor*  
syn. *Poterium sanguisorba*  
SALAD BURNET, PIMPERNEL

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height up to 24 in (60 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Tiny magenta flowers appear in summer with compact, thimble-shaped heads. The flowering stalks stand out above the gray-green tooth-edged leaves. In summer, the mature leaves become very bitter to taste. Cut back hard to encourage new growth.

*Santolina***Cotton lavender** ASTERACEAE

This silver-leaved herb is both useful and attractive in the herb garden. Medicinally, it was used by Arabian people as an eyewash, but today it is used in the home as an insect and moth repellent. Some sources suggest that the aroma of cotton lavender can also help to keep cats out of the garden but, after testing this, I can honestly say that it does not work. It is useful in herb garden design as an edging plant or as a dividing hedge within a larger bed, and is a suitable candidate for a dry or Mediterranean-type gravel garden.

**How to grow**

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation       |
|------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Santolina</i> | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seed in the fall in standard seed substrate mixed with horticultural sand and place in a cold frame; germination takes four to six months. Grow on in a cold frame for two years before planting out. Take stem cuttings from new nonflowering growth in late summer. Winter young cotton lavender plants in a cold frame before planting out the following spring. In late summer, mature woody stems can be propagated by layering (see page 51). Cut off the flowers before you start the process.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in a sunny position. Avoid nutrient-rich soils for best results. Plant individual plants 24 in (45 cm) apart and hedge plants at 15 in (38 cm) intervals. Cotton lavenders grows well in containers. Use soil-based substrate. Feed once a week only during the growing season with a liquid seaweed fertilizer.

**MAINTENANCE** Cotton lavender plants can be clipped to shape in spring after flowering. In spring, cut out dead wood from established plants. In late summer, cut off the flowers to prevent the plant from becoming woody. In cold climates, do not cut back cotton lavender in the fall because frost and damp will take hold and destroy the plant.

**HARVESTING** Pick cotton lavender leaves for drying from spring until just before flowering in summer. In late summer, harvest small bunches of flowering stems for drying.

**How to use**

Cotton lavender can be applied to surface wounds to encourage healing. It can also, when crushed, be rubbed on insect bites to ease the pain. The dried leaves are excellent for deterring moths.

▼ *Santolina chamaecyparissus*

## COTTON LAVENDER, LAVENDER COTTON

Hardy evergreen shrub. Height 30 in (75 cm) and spread 3 ft (1 m). Yellow, button-shaped flowers appear from midsummer to early fall. The aromatic silver leaves are divided and remind me of ocean coral.

**Flower** looks similar to the center of a daisy that has lost its petals

**Stem** is covered with cottonlike hairs

**Leaf** is wispy and thin on the flowering stem, thicker and paler silver on the main body of the shrub



*Saponaria***Soapwort** CARYOPHYLLACEAE

As its name suggests, a natural lather can be made from the leaves, stem, and roots of this herb. When boiled in water, the plant releases saponins and produces a slippery substance that has the power to lift grease and dirt. Interestingly, soapwort was once used in the wool industry for cleaning new wool, and in Britain, colonies of soapwort plants can still be found growing close to old mills. It is still used by museum conservators to lift surface dirt gently from fragile antique textiles and paintings, and can be found growing wild on poor soils throughout North America, Europe, and Asia.

**How to grow**

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation       |
|------------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Saponaria</i> | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** In my experience, it is far easier to grow soapwort from stem cuttings or by division than from seed because it takes the seed a long time to germinate, and success is not always guaranteed. Take cuttings at the stem joint in late spring to early summer. Divide established plants in fall after cutting back.

**SITE** This plant will tolerate any soil in a sunny position, but if the soil is too rich in nutrients, soapwort growth will be too rapid and difficult to control. Avoid planting soapwort near fish ponds because it has creeping rhizomes that excrete a poison in wet soil that is harmful to fish. Dwarf species like *Saponaria ocymoides* are better suited to containers because of their size.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back after flowering to clear up the garden and prevent the plant from self-seeding. Cutting back will also encourage new growth and, in mild winters, a second flowering. In the fall, dig up any invasive roots.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves as required throughout the growing season.

**How to use**

Soapwort is used as a treatment for dry, itchy, skin conditions and as an anti-inflammatory. Mildly poisonous, it should be used medicinally only when prescribed by a qualified herbalist. In the home, it is used in both skin- and haircare products, particularly for those with sensitive skin. Simmer a handful of leaves for seven minutes, strain, and add to a bath to treat dry, itchy skin. Soapwort also makes a good cleaning product for delicate silk garments and upholstery.

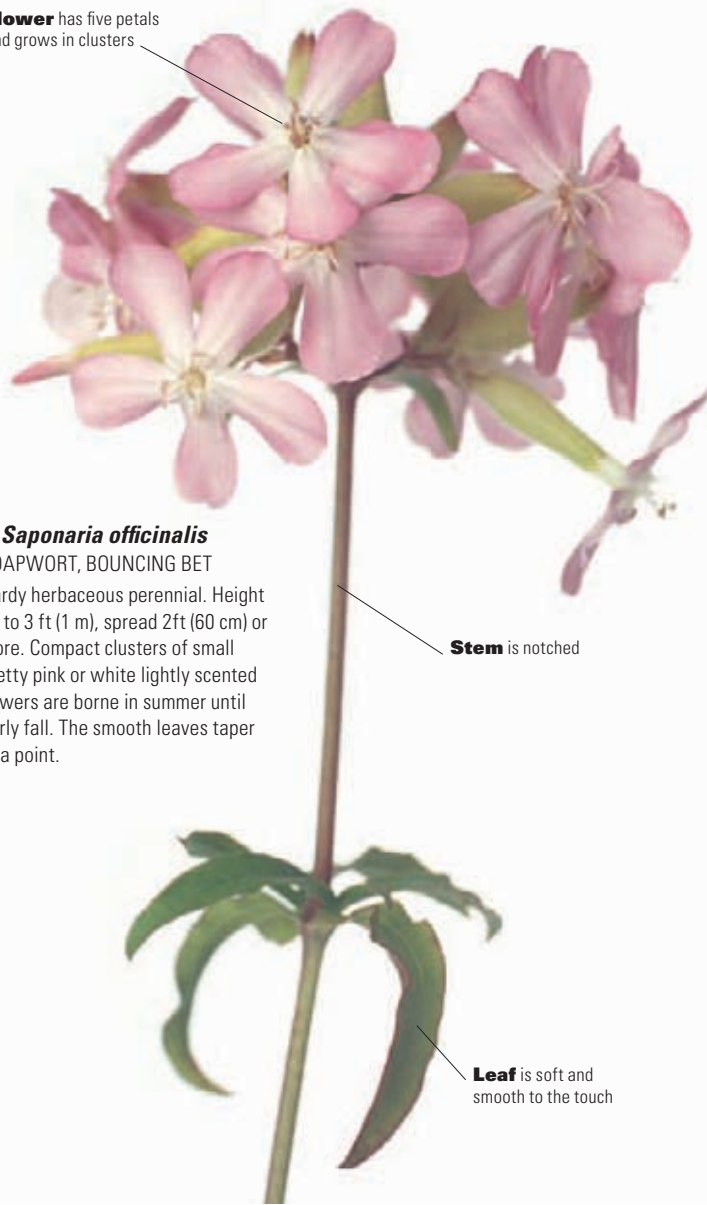
**Flower** has five petals and grows in clusters

► ***Saponaria officinalis*****SOAPWORT, BOUNCING BET**

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 3 ft (1 m), spread 2 ft (60 cm) or more. Compact clusters of small pretty pink or white lightly scented flowers are borne in summer until early fall. The smooth leaves taper to a point.

**Stem** is notched

**Leaf** is soft and smooth to the touch





*Satureja*

**Savory** LAMIACEAE

The Ancient Egyptians used savory in love potions, whereas the Romans used it to flavor sauces and vinegars, and I also use it liberally in cooking to add a spicy taste to meat and fish dishes. The leaves, when crushed, are an excellent remedy for wasp and bee stings. Good specimens for the herb garden include: pink savory (*Satureja thymbra*) from the Mideast, which has pale purple flowers and a spicy flavor; lemon savory (*S. biflora*) from Africa, which has a spicy lemon taste; and winter savory (*S. montana*), which has a peppery taste and is a successful low edging plant.

**CAUTION** Do not take savory medicinally during pregnancy.

**How to grow**

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Satureja</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in early spring and place under protection at 68°F (20°C); germination takes one to two weeks. Once germinated, do not overwater because seedlings are prone to “damping off.” Take cuttings of perennial savories in summer from new stem growth. Once rooted, pot up and grow on in a cold frame. Plant out the following spring into a well-prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in a sunny position in well-drained, poor soil that has not been fed the previous fall. Perennial savory species grow well in containers. Use a soil-based substrate, mixed with equal parts of coarse horticultural grit. Place the container in a sunny, dry, sheltered position.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back perennial savories after flowering. Keep picking summer savory from the top to maintain leaf supply for as long as possible. Do not feed garden plants with compost or liquid fertilizer. For container plants, feed once a week with a liquid seaweed fertilizer during the growing season.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves before or after flowering to use fresh, and before flowering for drying. Pick the flowers in the summer for use fresh or for preserving in butter (see page 225).

**How to use**

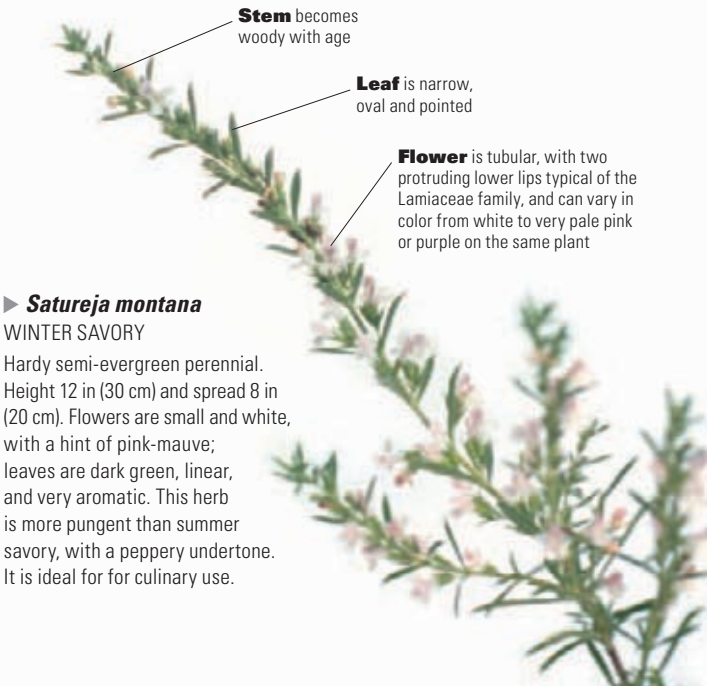
Fresh savory leaves have a sweet aroma and pungent flavor and can be used as a substitute for black pepper in cooking, although the flavor becomes less pungent when the herb is boiled for any length of time. Medicinally, savory species have properties similar to thyme, rosemary, and oregano: they are antibacterial, antifungal, and antiseptic.



▲ ***Satureja hortensis***  
SUMMER SAVORY, BEAN HERB  
Half-hardy annual. Height 12 in (30 cm) and spread 8 in (20 cm). Small white flowers tinged with mauve appear in summer. The aromatic leaves are oval and pointed. A favorite in America and Europe.



▲ ***Satureja douglasii***  
YERBA BUENA  
Half-hardy evergreen perennial. Height 4 in (10 cm) and spread indefinite. This California herb has very strong-flavored leaves and can be used sparingly to make an herbal tea to reduce fevers.



► ***Satureja montana***  
WINTER SAVORY  
Hardy semi-evergreen perennial. Height 12 in (30 cm) and spread 8 in (20 cm). Flowers are small and white, with a hint of pink-mauve; leaves are dark green, linear, and very aromatic. This herb is more pungent than summer savory, with a peppery undertone. It is ideal for for culinary use.

*Scutellaria*

# Skullcap virginia

 LAMIACEAE

Its common name, "skullcap", is said to have originated from the shape of the flower, which was thought to resemble the helmets worn by Roman soldiers. It was used by Native Americans to treat women's menstrual problems, and in the 18th century it was thought to be a cure for rabies, although this has been disproved. Personally, I grow this herb because it is very attractive in the garden. The botanical name comes from "scutella," or "small shield," because of the shape of the seed. The seeds are not only a good source of bird food, they also make a delightful sound in a light breeze.

**CAUTION** This is not a culinary herb. It should be dispensed only by a trained herbalist.

## How to grow

| Herb               | Soil | Propagation |
|--------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Scutellaria</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seeds in the fall and place in a cold frame; germination takes three to four weeks. Winter young plants in a cold frame. If there is no germination during this time, place the seed tray outside so the seeds can be stratified by the cold weather. In warm climates, place the seeds in the refrigerator for four weeks to stratify them; germination can take a further five to seven months. It can flower in the first season from seed. Take root cuttings from the rhizomes in spring (see page 52), or stem cuttings in summer from nonflowering shoots. Divide established plants in the fall.

**SITE** Plant in poor, moisture-retentive soil in sun or semi-shade. Skullcap virginia will adapt to most soil types with the exception of acid and waterlogged soils. This plant is not suited for container growing because the rhizomes tend to rot if they are unable to spread out.

**MAINTENANCE** After collecting seeds, cut back to promote new growth. In the fall, dig up any plants that have started to spread. Divide established plants every third year to maintain a healthy plant. Do not feed; a nutrient-rich soil will cause soft growth and excessive root spread.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves and flowers of skullcap virginia for drying in summer, for medicinal use only.

## How to use

This is an important medicinal herb. It is often added to nerve formulas along with valerian (see page 212) and other herbs. The whole plant is an effective soothing, antispasmodic tonic. It is used to treat insomnia, stress, and muscular tension, and for reducing high blood pressure.

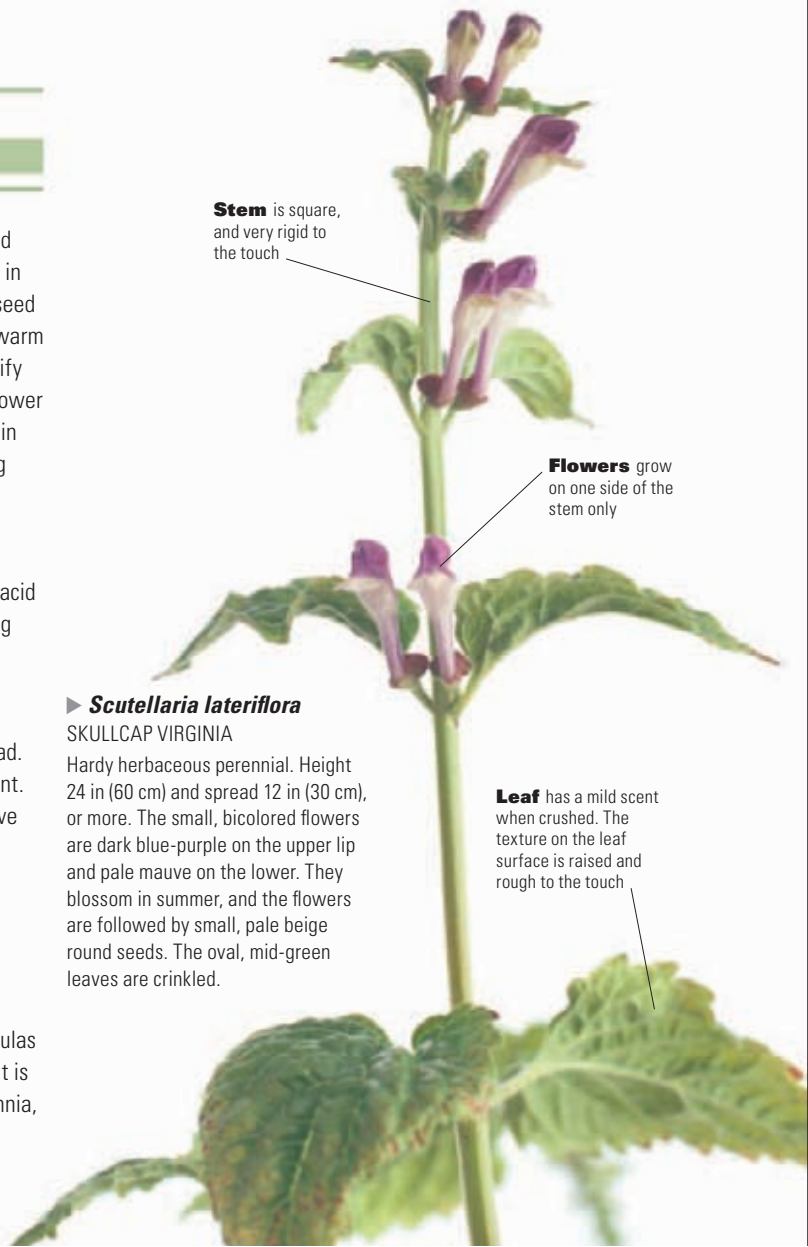
**Stem** is square, and very rigid to the touch

**Flowers** grow on one side of the stem only

### ► *Scutellaria lateriflora* SKULLCAP VIRGINIA

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 24 in (60 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm), or more. The small, bicolored flowers are dark blue-purple on the upper lip and pale mauve on the lower. They blossom in summer, and the flowers are followed by small, pale beige round seeds. The oval, mid-green leaves are crinkled.

**Leaf** has a mild scent when crushed. The texture on the leaf surface is raised and rough to the touch



*Sempervivum*

# Houseleek CRASSULACEAE

This herb is an old family favorite. When my son was growing up, I encouraged him to keep houseleek leaves in his pockets to rub on nettle stings and cuts, since they have soothing and gentle healing properties similar to *Aloe vera* (however, the two plants are not related). Historically, houseleeks were grown on the roofs of houses because it was believed that they would protect a thatched roof from fire and the occupants from witchcraft. The Americans considered this such a useful herb that they took a supply with them to treat earache and ease toothache.

## How to grow

| Herb               | Soil | Propagation |
|--------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Sempervivum</i> | Sand | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seeds in spring or summer. Because they are very fine, mix with the finest sand or flour. Water from the bottom or with a fine spray, and cover the container with glass to keep the seed warm. Place in a frostfree environment, such as a cold frame; germination takes one to six months. Once this happens, remove the glass and cover the growing medium with fine sand. All houseleeks produce offsets that cluster around the base of the parent plant. In spring each offset starts its own root system. Either pot up each individually, or plant each one directly into the ground.

**SITE** Houseleeks grow happily in very little soil since they have very short roots. Plant in wall crevices or rock gardens, or in between paving stones. For growing in containers, use a soil-based substrate mixed equally with sharp horticultural grit to improve drainage.

**MAINTENANCE** In the fall, if the plant has become invasive, remove offsets and pot up to produce a new stock of young plants as insurance against a bad winter. Pests like vine weevils attack pot-grown houseleeks, so check the roots each fall for infestation and repot if necessary.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves to use fresh throughout the growing season.

## How to use

Apply the saplike gel directly to nettle stings and minor burns. Make an infusion from the leaves to treat bronchitis. To remove a corn, cut a leaf in half, bind the fleshy side to the corn for a few hours, then soak the foot in water. Try to gently scrape off the corn. Repeat as necessary.

Leaves are succulent, oval, and gray-green with darker tips



▲ *Sempervivum tectorum*  
HOUSELEEK  
Hardy evergreen succulent. Height 6 in (15 cm) when in flower and spread 8 in (20 cm). Pink star-shaped flowers appear in summer, although they can take several years to flower. When broken in half, the succulent leaves release a sappy gel, which can be applied to minor burns, insect bites, or nettle stings. Plant in a container or in a niche in a garden wall. Each offshoot around the base of the mother plant has its own integral root system.



*Solidago*

# Goldenrod

ASTERACEAE

This late summer-flowering herb signals the change in season, hence its common names “cast the spear” and “farewell summer.” It was much in demand in the 16th and 17th centuries as a remedy for fixing loose teeth, for kidney stones, and as a wound-healer. Originally imported from the Mideast, it was later cultivated in Britain for its medicinal properties, and became naturalized in some regions; demand then plummeted. A good companion plant, flowers are attractive to beneficial insects, especially lacewings, which control the whitefly and aphid populations in the garden.

## How to grow

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Solidago</i> | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** The seeds need stratification to germinate (see page 45). Sow fresh in the fall and place the container outside to expose it to winter weather. In warm climates place seed in the refrigerator for four weeks, then sow and place outside; germination takes four to six months. Take root cuttings in spring. Divide established plants in the fall, replanting in a well-prepared site.

**SITE** Goldenrod will grow in most soils, with the exception of rich soils. It favors a moisture-retentive soil in a sunny position. It can be grown in containers, but use a soil-based substrate mixed in equal parts with fine bark that is low in nutrients.

**MAINTENANCE** Lift the roots and replant every other year to prevent matting and invasive spreading. Repot container-grown plants every fall to prevent the roots from rotting. In addition to attracting beneficial insects, it also attracts the tortrix moth, whose caterpillars roll themselves up in the leaves. The only organic way to get rid of this pest is to use an elder leaf wash (see page 188) or hand-pick them off.

**HARVESTING** Pick leaves and flowering tops just before the flowers are fully opened to dry for medicinal use.

## How to use

Goldenrod is used medicinally to treat urinary infections, skin diseases, kidney stones, wounds, insect bites, and external skin ulcers. The leaves and flowers are also used to make a yellow plant dye for textiles.

### ▼ *Solidago virgaurea*

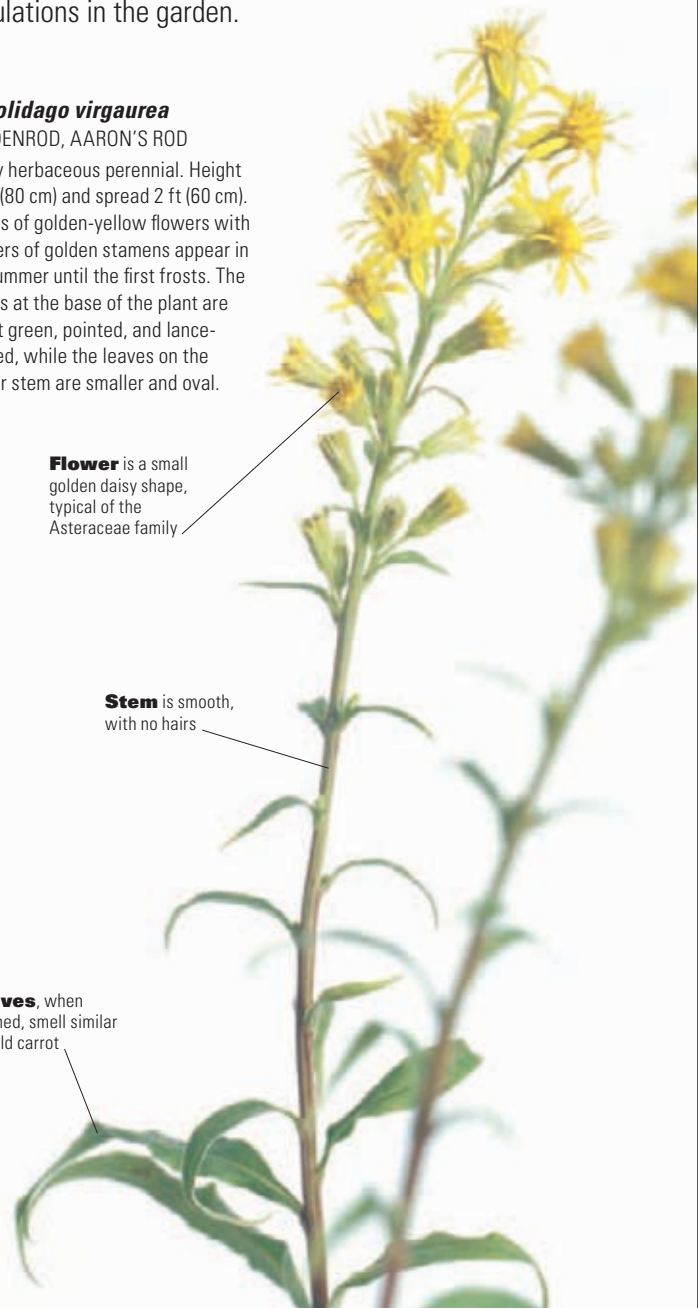
GOLDENROD, AARON'S ROD

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 32 in (80 cm) and spread 2 ft (60 cm). Spikes of golden-yellow flowers with clusters of golden stamens appear in midsummer until the first frosts. The leaves at the base of the plant are bright green, pointed, and lance-shaped, while the leaves on the flower stem are smaller and oval.

**Flower** is a small golden daisy shape, typical of the Asteraceae family

**Stem** is smooth, with no hairs

**Leaves**, when crushed, smell similar to wild carrot



*Stachys*

# Betony

LAMIACEAE

This attractive flower is a worthwhile addition to any herb garden. Even though it is a wild plant, betony has adapted to the cultivated garden, giving a colorful display in the summer and attracting butterflies and bees. On the occasions when I have exhibited betony at flower shows, it has always drawn the crowds. Medicinally, it was claimed that it could cure over 47 different ailments, including “elf sickness” in the 10th century, and was used as a tobacco and snuff in the 18th century. It is taken for nervous disorders, and should be used only under medical supervision.

**CAUTION** The root of betony is toxic, and should be used only under medical supervision.

## How to grow

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation |
|----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Stachys</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds when fresh in early fall. Place in a cold frame; germination takes two to four weeks, but can be longer. Winter young plants in the cold frame before planting out the following spring. Alternatively, sow directly into their planting position in the fall. Cover lightly with leafmold (see page 37). Mark the area where you have sown; germination occurs the next spring. Divide established plants in spring or fall. Replant 12 in (30 cm) apart.

**SITE** This herb tolerates most situations. For preference, plant betony in a fertile soil in sun or partial shade. Another favored site for the plant is at the edge of deciduous woodland. I have also grown it to great effect in a container mixed with other wildflowers, using a loam-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** This plant needs little maintenance. In early fall, save the seed before cutting back the flowers. In dry soils, mulch with a layer of leafmold (see page 37).

**HARVESTING** Collect the leaves for drying in late spring before the plant flowers. Pick flowers for drying just as they open. Gather leaves before and after flowering.

## How to use

Betony is used in Europe to treat diarrhea, cystitis, and liver and gall bladder infections. A weak infusion of the leaves makes a refreshing cup of tea, which also treats headaches. A hair rinse made from an infusion of the leaves, to be used after washing the hair, will darken gray hair. All parts of the plant can be used as a yellow plant dye for textiles.



▲ *Stachys officinalis*  
BETONY

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 24 in (60 cm) and spread 10 in (25 cm). Dense spikes of pink or purple flowers appear throughout summer. The dark green, oval leaves have scalloped edges. The leaf surface is perforated with glands that contain a bitter aromatic oil.

*Stevia rebaudiana*

**Stevia** ASTERACEAE

Indigenous to South America, this truly amazing herb has been used for hundreds of years. Studies show that ¼ tsp of dried chopped leaf is equivalent in sweetness to 8 oz (225 g) of sugar! In the USA and Europe, stevia has been banned as a food or food ingredient, but is sold as a dietary supplement rather than as a sweetener in the USA. The Japanese have banned all artificial sweeteners with the exception of stevia, which they have used for years with no adverse effects. Personally, I will stop using this herb when it is proven to be unsafe but, to date, no such proof has been presented.

**CAUTION** In the USA this herb can only be sold as a dietary supplement, not as a sweetener. It is banned for sale as a food or food ingredient in Britain and EU.

**How to grow**

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation       |
|---------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Stevia</i> | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seeds in spring under protection at 65°F (18°C); germination is erratic. Cuttings are by far the most reliable method of propagation for this herb. Take semiripe cuttings from non-flowering shoots in early summer.

**SITE** Outside the tropics, this herb can only be grown as an annual in the garden, where it should be planted in full sun in a light fertile soil that does not dry out in summer. In cool climates, this herb will grow happily in a container using a loam-based potting substrate mixed in equal parts with composted fine bark. In fall, bring the container in to a frost-free environment, cut the growth back to 4in (10cm), and reduce the watering to a minimum, but do not allow the plant to dry out. Reintroduce watering and pot up in the spring. Place the container outside once all threat of frost has passed.

**MAINTENANCE** In the tropics, this herb rarely needs maintenance. In cold and cool climates it is prone to mildew so water carefully, keeping it to a minimum. Remove any infected leaves and burn—do not compost them.

**HARVESTING** Pick the leaves to use fresh as required from spring until late summer. The best flavor is from the young leaves. Pick the leaves for harvesting in early summer.

**How to use**

Stevia can be used as a sugar substitute in many dishes, but is very strong and sweet and should be used in moderation. It can withstand high temperatures but is not suitable for baking, because it lacks sugar’s abilities to add texture, caramelize, or feed the fermentation of yeast.



▲ *Stevia rebaudiana*  
STEVIA, SWEET LEAF, YERBA DULCE, HONEYLEAF, CAA'-EHE  
Subtropical, evergreen perennial, grown as an annual in cold climates. Height and spread of 18 in (45 cm). It bears clusters of small, white flowers in late summer and early fall, and has mid-green, oval leaves with serrated edges.



*Symphytum***Comfrey** BORAGINACEAE

This invasive plant may be considered a weed by many, but the nutrients it contains are useful to the organic gardener. The leaves are naturally high in protein, potash, and potassium, and make a wonderful mulch or liquid feed (see page 39) without having to resort to chemically manufactured products. Medicinally, its potential for healing external wounds and broken bones is unchallenged, hence its common names, knitbone and boneset. Currently one of its key constituents, allantoin, which stimulates the growth of new cells, is undergoing research.



**Root** is fibrous with a blackish exterior. Inside it is fleshy, juicy, and white.

**How to grow**

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation   |
|------------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Symphytum</i> | Loam | Root cuttings |

**CAUTION** Do not take comfrey internally unless prescribed. Skin contact can also cause dermatitis.

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in the fall and place in a cold frame; germination takes three to twenty weeks, but is very erratic. The easiest method is root cuttings taken in spring (see page 52). Established plants can be divided in the fall. Any piece of root that is left in the soil will root and create another plant.

**SITE** Comfrey prefers a moist soil in sun or partial shade. It is ideal for clay, although it will tolerate all but arid conditions. Choose the position in the garden with care. *Symphytum officinale* will self-seed erratically and, because of its very long taproot, it is nearly impossible to move once established. Comfrey can be grown in large containers. A trash can with drainage holes is ideal. Use garden loam with 10 percent coarse horticultural grit added.

**MAINTENANCE** Comfrey sometimes suffers from rust (see page 148) and powdery mildew. With both diseases, cut the plant down to the ground and burn the contaminated leaves. When growing comfrey for leaf harvest, do not allow the plant to dry out in summer.

**HARVESTING** Cut the leaves before flowering from early summer until fall to provide foliage for the liquid fertilizer (see page 39). Each plant is able to provide four leaf harvests per season. In the fall, dig up second-year growth roots for drying.

**How to use**

Medicinally, comfrey is used externally for cuts, as a compress, and to treat varicose veins, and was traditionally thought to heal broken bones. It can also be used for curing septic sores on animals, and as an animal feed. A golden yellow textile dye can be made from the leaves.



▲ *Symphytum x uplandicum*  
RUSSIAN COMFREY

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height and spread 3 ft (1 m). It produces clusters of pink, purple, and blue flowers in summer, and has green, lance-shaped leaves covered with fine, slightly prickly hairs. A cross between *Symphytum officinale* and *S. asperum*, it does not self-seed, but has the same nutrient-rich foliage properties as *S. officinale*.



**Leaf** is covered with bristly hairs. It decreases in size the higher it grows up the stem

**Flower** grows in one-sided clusters along a curving hairy stem

▲ *Symphytum officinale*

COMFREY, KNITBONE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height and spread 3 ft (1 m). Clusters of white, purple, or pink flowers appear in summer. The leaves are green, lance-shaped, and hairy. Young fresh leaves and shoots can be eaten like spinach, and are a rich source of vitamin B12.

*Tagetes*

# Mexican marigolds

ASTERACEAE

The following marigolds are from the *Tagetes* genus, rather than *Calendula* (see page 97), with which they are sometimes confused. *Tagetes* contains 56 species, including the plants known as Mexican, French, or African marigolds, which originated in Central and South America and were used as medicinal and ritual plants. I have chosen two Mexican marigolds that I find invaluable in an organic herb garden: the wild Mexican marigold (*T. patula*) for pest control, and *T. lucida*, whose fresh leaves have a flavor similar to French tarragon (see page 193), hence its common name, winter tarragon.

## How to grow

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation   |
|----------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Tagetes</i> | Sand | Seed/cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow in early spring under cover at 68°F (20°C); germination takes 14–21 days. Alternatively, sow in late spring into prepared open ground when the air temperature does not fall below 50°F (10°C) at night; germination takes two to four weeks. Take cuttings of perennial varieties from nonflowering stems in summer. Winter young plants in a frostfree environment.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained, fertile soil in a sunny position. Mexican marigold is ideal for interplanting in the vegetable garden, repelling soil nematodes and also slugs and aphids. *T. lucida* is a tender perennial that grows well in pots. Winter in a frostfree environment and use a soil-based substrate mixed with one-third coarse horticultural grit.

**MAINTENANCE** In early summer, pinch out or cut back the growing tips of young marigold plants to promote bushy growth. Deadhead flowers to prolong flowering.

**HARVESTING** Pick flowers for drying in summer. Harvest leaves in summer to use fresh or to dry. If protected from frost, the leaves of *T. lucida* can be picked up until midwinter.

## How to use

Medicinally, *T. patula* is a diuretic and improves digestion. Externally, it relieves sore eyes and rheumatism. The yellow pigment in the fresh or dried flowers has been used to dye textiles. *T. lucida* grows in winter in cool climates under protection and so is a good substitute for *Artemisia dracunculus*. Leaves can also be burned as an insect repellent. Medicinally, *T. lucida* is used to treat diarrhea, indigestion, and feverishness. It is used externally to remove ticks.



▲ *Tagetes lucida*

WINTER TARRAGON, SWEET MACE

Tender herbaceous perennial. Height 32 in (80 cm) in warm climates only and spread 18 in (45 cm). Yellow flowers appear in late summer. The mid-green leaves are narrow and toothed. They have a strong aniseed scent and flavor similar to that of tarragon. In cool climates, this herb dies back in early spring, reappearing in early summer.





**Flower** is typical of the Asteraceae family. The daisylike petals can vary in color from golden yellow through to brown

**Leaf** shape is typical of *Tagetes* species

**Leaf** is highly aromatic with a pungent scent

◀ ***Tagetes patula***

WILD MEXICAN MARIGOLD,  
FRENCH MARIGOLD

Half hardy annual. Height 4 ft (1.2 m) and spread 18 in (45 cm). Clusters of single yellow flowers appear in midsummer until the first fall frosts. The mid-green leaves are deeply divided and lightly toothed. This species is a good companion plant because it deters nematodes in the soil and repels whitefly from ripening tomatoes.

Tanacetum

Silver tanacetums ASTERACEAE

Tanacetums are members of the daisy (Asteraceae) family and thrive in the herb garden or herbaceous border. Silver leaves distinguish the silver tanacetums. Like many ancient herbs, they grow very successfully and become invasive, which is perhaps one reason why they have managed to survive for so long. Pyrethrum, a well-known insecticide, is made from the dried flowers of *Tanacetum cinerariifolium*. It is illegal in the European Union to use pyrethrum in spray form because insecticide sprays can also kill beneficial insects. However, it is nontoxic to mammals.

**CAUTION** Wear gloves when handling; the flower can cause a minor skin rash.

How to grow

| Herb      | Soil | Propagation |
|-----------|------|-------------|
| Tanacetum | Sand | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring and place in a cold frame. Do not cover. Germination takes two to four weeks. Plant out silver tanacetums when the seedlings are large enough to handle. Divide established plants in the fall or spring, replanting into a prepared site. Plant *Tanacetum cinerariifolium* 12 in (30 cm) apart and *T. balsamita* at 24 in (60 cm) intervals.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained, fertile soil in a sunny position. Both species are drought-tolerant and will adapt to most soils and conditions. However, they are unlikely to flower if planted in shade. Both grow well in containers. Use a soil-based substrate and feed once a month throughout the growing season with liquid seaweed feed.

**MAINTENANCE** Deadhead regularly to promote new flower growth. Divide established plants every few years to keep them healthy and to prevent them from becoming too invasive. Do not feed with nutrients, which will encourage soft growth and disease.

**HARVESTING** Pick the leaves of *T. balsamita* before flowering to use fresh or to dry. Pick the flowerheads of *T. cinerariifolium* just as they open and dry on a fabric frame (see page 73). Store dried flowers in a dark glass jar out of direct sunlight.

How to use

Wearing gloves, sprinkle the powdered flowers of *T. cinerariifolium* around the doors to repel ants. *T. balsamita* was used for brewing ale.



◀ **Tanacetum balsamita**  
ALECOST, COSTMARY  
Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 3 ft (1 m) when in flower and spread 18 in (45 cm). Clusters of small, white, yellow-eyed daisy flowers are produced from mid- to late summer. The soft, aromatic, silver-green leaves can relieve the pain of a bee sting or a horsefly bite.



▲ **Tanacetum parthenium**  
FEVERFEW  
Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 4 ft (1.2 m) and a spread of 18 in (45 cm). It has clusters of small, white, yellow-eyed daisy flowers, which appear from early summer until the first frosts. The leaf is mid-green, lobed, and divided with lightly serrated edges.



### ◀ *Tanacetum vulgare*

#### TANSY

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 4 ft (1.2 m) and an indefinite spread. Clusters of yellow, buttonlike flowers appear from summer until late fall. The dark green, feathery leaves have toothed edges. Dried bunches of aromatic tansy make effective fly repellents.



**Flower** is a classic white daisy with a yellow eye. It looks wonderful planted in big drifts

### ▶ *Tanacetum cinerariifolium*

#### PYRETHRUM, DALMATIAN DAISY

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 15 in (37 cm) and spread 8 in (20 cm). White, yellow-eyed daisy flowers grow throughout the summer months. The gray-green leaves are finely divided. A powerful insecticide, also known as pyrethrum, is made from the dried and powdered flowers.

**Stem** is covered in a soft silvery white down

**Leaf** is gray-green on the upper surface. The underside is covered with silvery white down





*Teucrium*

# Germanders & wood sage

LAMIACEAE

There has been a lot of confusion over species of *Teucrium*, and when purchasing plants for medicinal use, it is important to establish their correct identification. All the species mentioned here are native to northern Europe and have become naturalized in Britain. *T. chamaedrys* was traditionally used to treat digestive disorders, and *T. scorodonia* was used on the Channel Islands as an alternative to hops as the bitter element in beer-making. *T. scorodonia* was once called “hind heal,” from the belief that the hind (female deer) will eat it when sick or wounded.

**CAUTION** Do not take internally unless under professional guidance.

## How to grow

| Herb            | Soil | Propagation       |
|-----------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Teucrium</i> | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in the fall, using a standard loam-based seed substrate mixed in equal parts with coarse horticultural sand. Place outside for the winter. The seeds need stratification to germinate (see page 46). In warm climates, place in a refrigerator for one month prior to sowing; germination takes four to six months. When large enough to handle, plant out into a prepared site 8 in (20 cm) apart. A simpler method of propagation is to take cuttings in summer from new growth. Winter young plants in a cold frame, planting out the following spring. Divide established plants in the fall, replanting in a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained, slightly alkaline soil in a sunny position. This species tolerates temperatures as low as -20°F (-29°C) but dislikes wet conditions. *T. x lucidrys* makes an ideal hedge. Plant 6 in (15 cm) apart. Germanders, especially *T. x lucidrys*, make good container plants.

**MAINTENANCE** When grown as a hedge, clip germanders in spring and fall to maintain their shape. If you do not cut back in the spring, it will produce pink flowers in late summer. After this, cut back fairly hard to encourage lower growth.

**HARVESTING** Cut leaves from *T. chamaedrys* and *T. x lucidrys* when the plant is in flower for drying or for use in medicinal infusions. Pick leaves of *T. scorodonia* before and after flowering to use fresh or to dry. For culinary uses, pick in spring before the leaves become tough.

## How to use

Rarely used in medicine, there is interest in *Teucrium* as an aid to weight loss. It is still used in the flavoring of liquors.



### ◀ *Teucrium chamaedrys*

#### WALL GERMANDER

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height and spread 10 in (25 cm). Pink flowers appear in midsummer until early fall. The aromatic, matte green leaves are oval, pointed, toothed, and lobed.

### ▶ *Teucrium x lucidrys*

#### HEDGE GERMANDER

Hardy evergreen shrub. Height 18 in (45 cm) and spread 8 in (20 cm). Pink flowers bloom from midsummer until early fall; the leaves are aromatic. This herb makes an ideal edging plant.

**Leaf** has a pleasantly spicy smell when rubbed

**Stem** is square in section

**Flower** is rose-colored, with a large, protruding lower petal, and grows in groups of three or six





▲ ***Teucrium scorodonia* 'Crispum'**

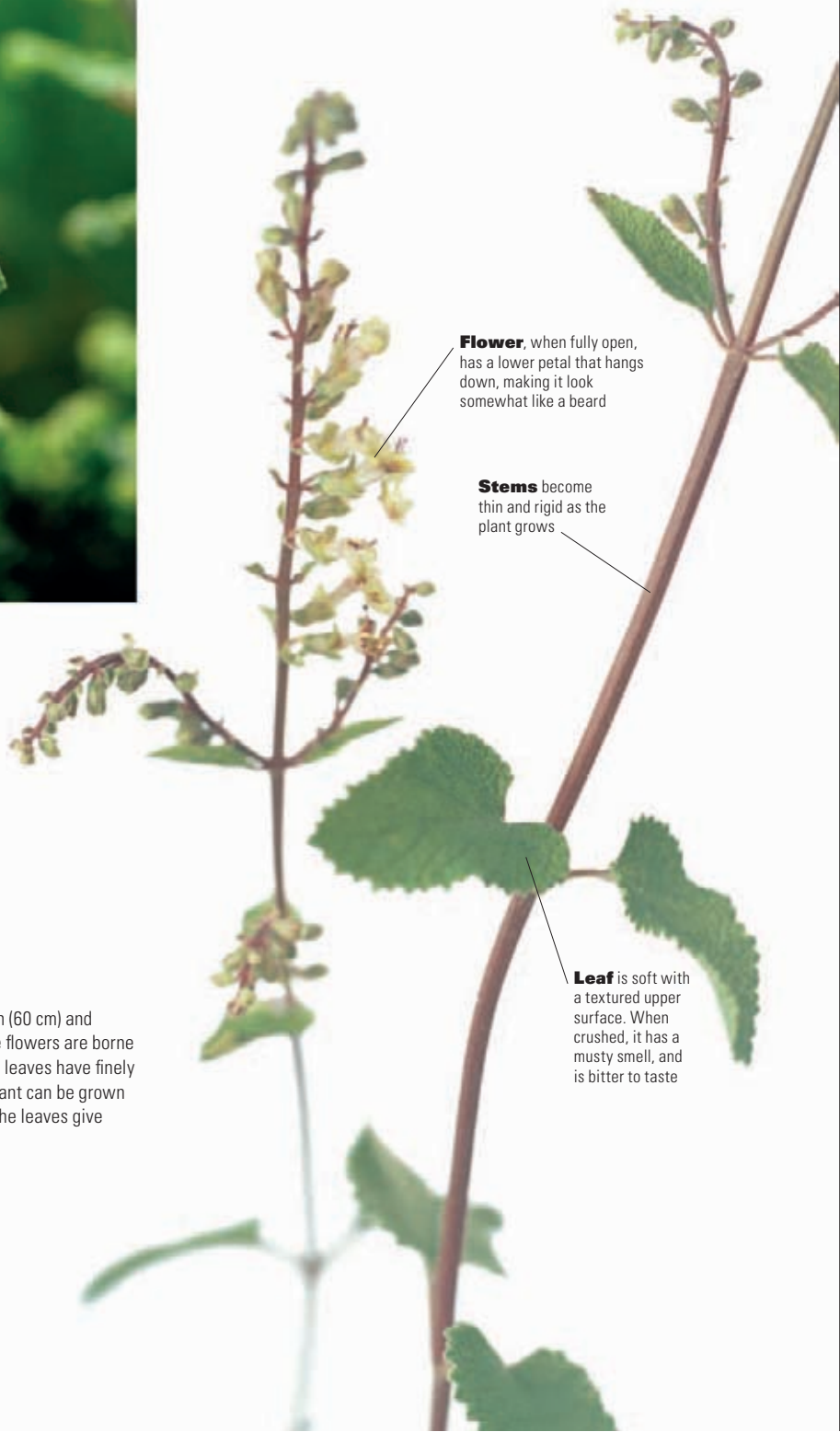
CURLY WOOD SAGE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 14 in (35 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Pale, greenish white flowers are borne in summer. Its soft, green, heart-shaped leaves, with very ruffled crinkled edges, can have a reddish tinge in the fall. This herb was much used by Gertrude Jekyll, a famous British plantswoman, who recognized its esthetic value in the garden.

► ***Teucrium scorodonia***

WOOD SAGE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height 24 in (60 cm) and spread 10 in (24 cm). Pale greenish white flowers are borne in summer. The soft green, heart-shaped leaves have finely toothed edges. This natural woodland plant can be grown to great effect in a mixed herb garden. The leaves give texture and the flowers a subtle hue.



**Flower**, when fully open, has a lower petal that hangs down, making it look somewhat like a beard

**Stems** become thin and rigid as the plant grows

**Leaf** is soft with a textured upper surface. When crushed, it has a musty smell, and is bitter to taste

*Thymus***Upright thymes** LAMIACEAE

The classic culinary thyme has an upright habit, making it easier to pick than the spreading or mounding thymes. The leaves of this group can vary in scent and flavor from the classic thyme to the more exotic spicy orange. In their natural environment, they grow at the edges of paths in rockeries and on escarpments—habitats that can be easily recreated in the garden. They also make a lovely edging for a path. Current research has shown that *Thymus vulgaris* helps arrest the aging process and is very beneficial in the treatment of stomach ulcers.

**CAUTION** Do not take thyme medicinally when pregnant.

**How to grow**

| Herb          | Soil | Propagation       |
|---------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Thymus</i> | Soil | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow the seed in spring. Because the seed is so small, mix it with fine horticultural sand or flour to make it easier to handle. Do not cover. Place under protection at 60°F (20°C). Germination takes five to ten days. Keep watering to a minimum because the seedlings are prone to “damping off.” Always water from the bottom. Take cuttings from new growth before flowering in late spring. Winter late cuttings in a cold frame. Divide established plants in spring in cold, wet climates; divide in the fall in warm, hot, dry climates.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in a sunny position. Thymes do not like wet winters or sitting in water. Make sure the soil has adequate drainage. To improve drainage, dig in extra horticultural grit. To grow in containers, use a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** In spring, lightly prune all upright and mounding thymes to encourage the growth of young shoots for strong leaf flavor, and prune the plants again after flowering in late summer to prevent them from becoming woody.

**HARVESTING** This evergreen herb can be picked all year round, for culinary or medicinal use. If the thyme leaves are to be used for drying, pick sprigs just before flowering.

**How to use**

Upright thymes are the classic thymes used in bouquet garni (see page 228). Added to cooking, the leaves aid digestion and help break down fatty foods. They also have strong antiseptic properties. An infusion or tea of thyme leaves makes an excellent remedy for sore throats and hangovers.



◀ ***Thymus 'Fragrantissimus'***  
ORANGE-SCENTED THYME

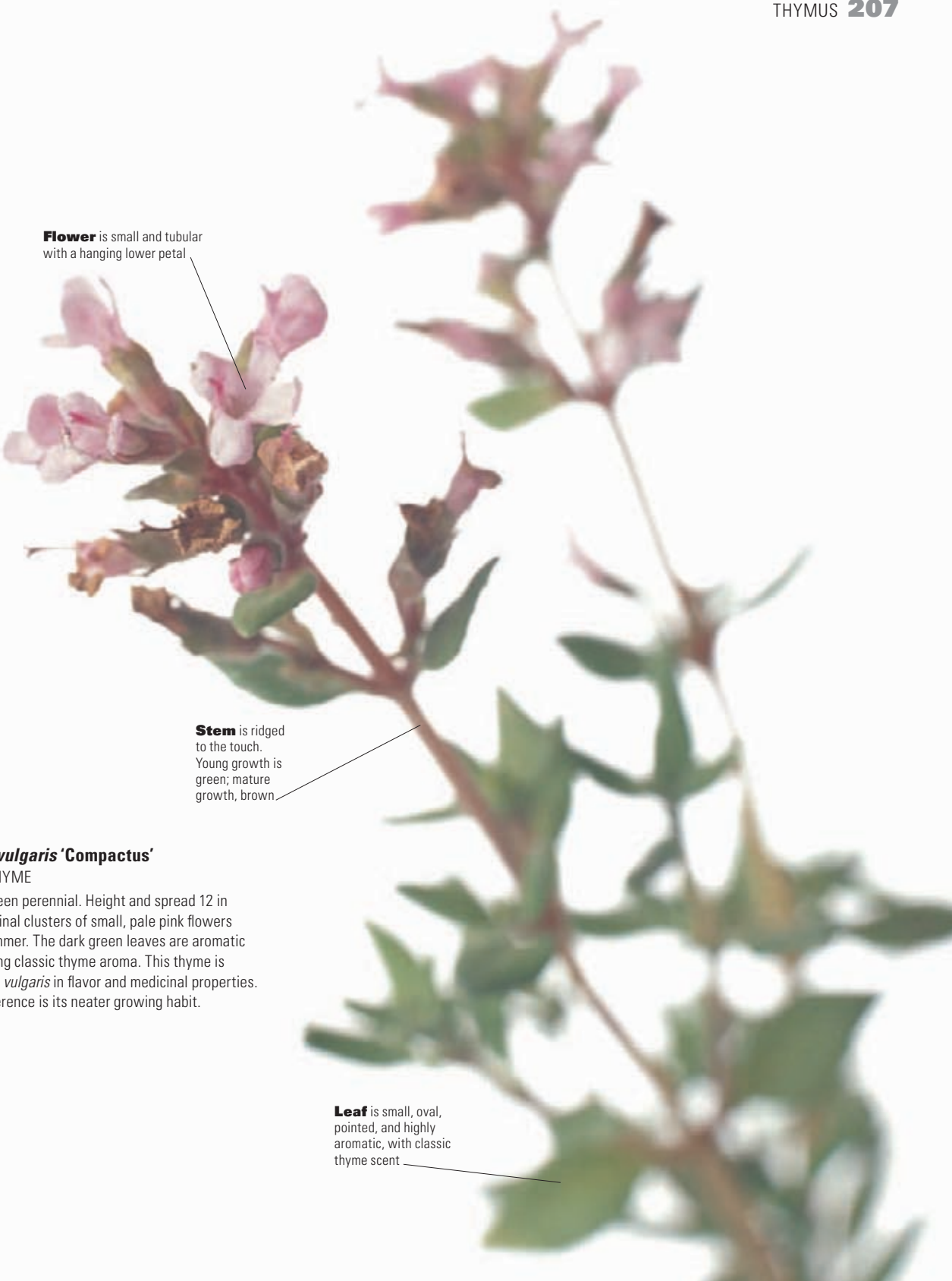
Hardy evergreen perennial. Height 12 in (30 cm) and spread 18 in (45 cm). The narrow, gray-green leaves have a spicy orange scent. This thyme also has a delightful warm flavor, which not only tastes good with meat and vegetables, but is wonderful with some sweet dishes.



▲ ***Thymus x citriodorus 'Silver Queen'***  
SILVER QUEEN THYME

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height 10 in (25 cm) and spread 18 in (45 cm). Terminal clusters of small pink flowers appear in summer. The leaves are small, oval, and gray variegated with silver. They have a strong lemon scent when rubbed between the fingertips or used in cooking, and this thyme goes particularly well with chicken and fish dishes.





**Flower** is small and tubular with a hanging lower petal

**Stem** is ridged to the touch. Young growth is green; mature growth, brown

► *Thymus vulgaris* 'Compactus'

COMPACT THYME

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height and spread 12 in (30 cm). Terminal clusters of small, pale pink flowers appear in summer. The dark green leaves are aromatic with the strong classic thyme aroma. This thyme is identical to *T. vulgaris* in flavor and medicinal properties. The only difference is its neater growing habit.

**Leaf** is small, oval, pointed, and highly aromatic, with classic thyme scent

Thymus

Creeping thymes LAMIACEAE

There is nothing more romantic than coming across a bank covered in creeping thyme or walking across ground overrun with these aromatic plants, which release their delicious fragrance as they are crushed underfoot. Their creeping habit and robust leaves make them ideally suited to path or lawn surfaces. The right growing conditions are particularly important for creeping thymes; they originate in the Mediterranean and need a sunny, well-drained site. Their creeping habit can, however, make it difficult to pick enough for culinary use.

How to grow

| Herb   | Soil | Propagation       |
|--------|------|-------------------|
| Thymus | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** See page 206 for details.

**SITE** To create a thyme path, prepare the site well before planting. Choose a sunny position. Thymes will not survive in shade, especially in wet climates. Dig the area over, removing all weeds. If the soil is heavy or cold, add plenty of extra-sharp horticultural grit. Lay a permeable membrane over the soil to inhibit weeds, while allowing rainwater to seep through to the soil. Cut slits in the membrane and plant the thyme plants through it, spacing them at 6 in (15 cm) intervals. Once planted, cover the membrane with washed grit or fine gravel, right up to the “necks” of the plants, laying the green plant growth over the grit.

**MAINTENANCE** See page 206 for details.

**HARVESTING** See page 206 for details.

How to use

See page 206 for details.



◀ **Thymus Coccineus Group**  
CREEPING RED THYME

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height 3 in (7 cm) and spread 36 in (1 m). Terminal clusters of small magenta flowers appear in summer, attracting bees and butterflies. The leaves are small, oval, dark green, and aromatic. This species can be grown successfully as part of a thyme walk.



▲ **Thymus serpyllum**  
CREEPING THYME, WILD THYME

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height 3 in (7 cm), spread 36 in (1m). Terminal clusters of small pink, mauve, or purple flowers appear in summer. It has small, oval, hairy, dark green, aromatic leaves. This thyme has strong medicinal properties and makes a potent natural antiseptic for use in the home.



▲ *Thymus serpyllum* 'Minor'  
MINOR THYME

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height ½ in (1 cm) and spread 6 in (15 cm). It has very short-stemmed pink flowers in summer, but will only flower in sunny, well-drained sites. Its dark green leaves form a mat on the ground. This tight-growing thyme is able to withstand being trampled underfoot.

**Flower** grows in terminal clusters blooming throughout the summer

**Leaf** is rounded and highly aromatic

**Stem** is green when showing new growth, turning brown with maturity

► *Thymus pulegioides*

BROAD-LEAVED THYME, MOTHER OF THYME

Hardy evergreen perennial. Height 10 in (25 cm) and spread 18 in (45 cm). Small terminal clusters of mauve flowers appear in summer. The dark green leaves are small, rounded, and aromatic. It produces much leaf with an excellent culinary flavor. Grow over a wall feature or along the edge of a flower border.





*Tropaeolum*

**Nasturtium** TROPAEOLACEAE

Common nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) is a valuable summer annual with its wonderfully bright flowers. It is a familiar sight in many gardens, but is rarely acknowledged as the useful culinary and medicinal herb it is. It was introduced into Europe from Peru in the 16th century and was first known as Indian cress (*Nasturtium indicum*) because of the peppery watercress-like flavor of the leaves. The practice of eating fresh petals and using them in tea originated in the Orient. There are now many more varieties, including those with variegated leaves and multicolored flowers.

**How to grow**

| Herb              | Soil | Propagation |
|-------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Tropaeolum</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow annual varieties in pots in early spring and place under protection; germination takes ten to twenty days. Alternatively, sow the seeds into prepared ground 8 in (20 cm) apart, when the air temperature does not fall below 48°F (9°C); germination takes 14 to 21 days. Unlike the annual, sow *T. speciosum* in autumn and place in a cold frame. Germination takes three to four weeks. If nothing happens, place outside for the winter. Germination can take as long as two years.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained soil in sun or partial shade. If soil is too rich, there will be too much foliage and little flower. Grows well in containers. Be mean with the nutrients in the substrate; dilute with ½ bark or coir.

**MAINTENANCE** Deadhead regularly to maintain flowering. Pick off seeds as they form to inhibit self-seeding. Water throughout the summer months. Nasturtium is renowned for attracting aphids and the caterpillars of the cabbage white butterfly. If the infestation is light, wash off; if severe, cut right back.

**HARVESTING** Use nasturtium fresh, picking the flowers, leaves, and seeds as required.

**How to use**

The seeds, leaves, and flowers all have a piquant taste and can be eaten in salads. Chopped leaves give a peppery flavour. Seeds can be pickled and used as an alternative to capers.

All parts of the plant are antibiotic. The leaves contain vitamin C and iron as well as an antiseptic substance, which is most potent before the plant flowers. Nasturtiums are thought good for the skin.



◀ *Tropaeolum majus*  
**'Empress of India'**

NASTURTIIUM EMPRESS OF INDIA  
Half-hardy annual. Height 8in (20cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). It has brightly coloured, helmet-shaped flowers with a long nectar spur that last throughout summer until the first frosts. A good companion plant, it deters woolly aphids from apple trees.



▲ *Tropaeolum speciosum*

FLAME NASTURTIIUM, SCOTTISH FLAME FLOWER

A hardy perennial climber, with a height of up to 10 ft (3 m) and an indefinite spread. In summer, scarlet flowers appear, followed by bright blue fruits. The leaves are green and lobed. Plant the roots in shade, so they do not dry out in hot summers. This nasturtium flowers in three to five years if grown from seed.

Ugni

# Chilean guava

MYRTACEAE

I grow hundreds of different herbs. All are wonderful, but occasionally there is one that becomes a particular favorite. This is one of those. Chilean guava, a member of the myrtle family, is characterized by its charming shell-pink flowers, followed by lush dark red fruit in the fall. The fruit tastes of wild strawberries and was reportedly a great favorite of Queen Victoria, who requested that jam be made for her from the sweet berries. It is now one of my dog’s favorites—it is a race in the fall to see who will harvest the fruit first!



**Fruit** ripens to dark red. It should be just soft to the touch before eating.

## How to grow

| Herb | Soil | Propagation       |
|------|------|-------------------|
| Ugni | Sand | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Either leave the berries on the bush until spring and sow fresh, or pick when ripe and store in a cold, dry place in a tray in a single layer until spring. Sow, and place under protection at 60°F (15°C); germination takes one to two months, but can take longer. Take softwood cuttings in summer from nonflowering shoots. For both propagation methods, pot up when the roots are established and grow on in a container for two seasons, before planting into a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in well-drained acid soil in full sun. Wet conditions will damage the plant quicker than cold. On an exposed, windy site, plant against a south- or west-facing wall. In warm climates, grow it as a low hedge. It can also be grown in containers. Use an ericaceous substrate. Do not upgrade the pot size—it prefers being potbound.

**MAINTENANCE** Feed only once in spring with well-rotted compost. In containers, feed weekly during the growing season. Overfed plants will not flower. In warm climates, trim the plant in the fall to maintain its shape; in colder climates trim in spring.

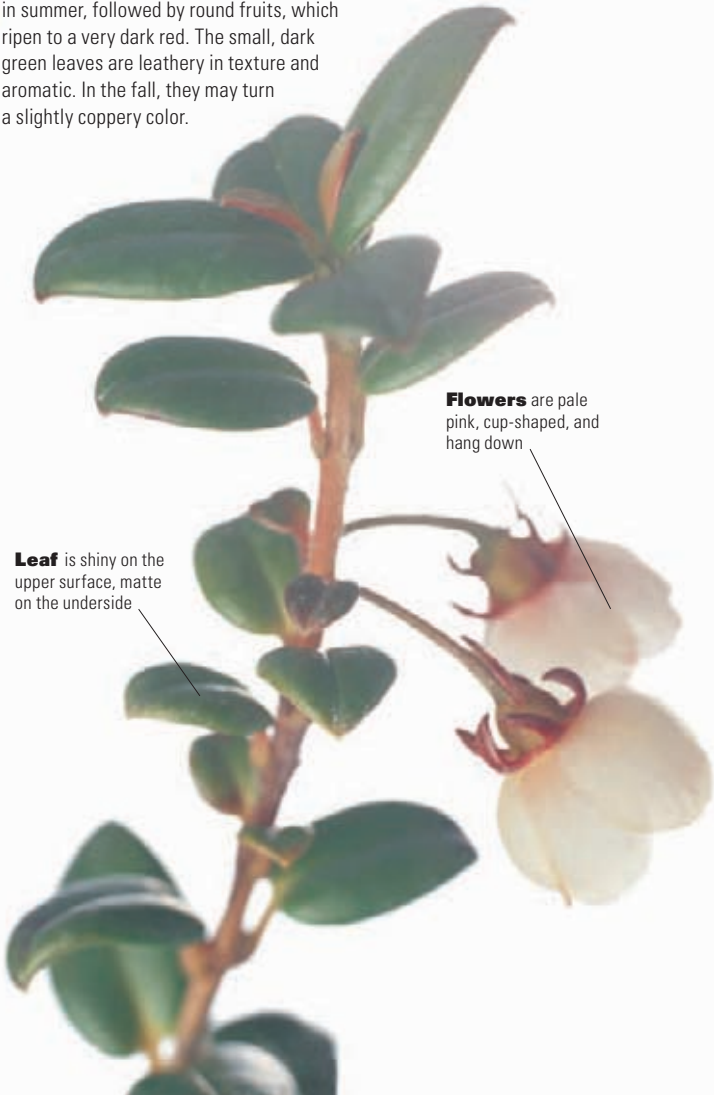
**HARVESTING** Pick fresh leaves as required through the year. Harvest fresh flowers in summer. By late fall the berries will be ripe and ready to eat.

## How to use

The leaves of Chilean guava can be used to make a spicy-flavored tea, or to add a warm spicy flavor to stews and casseroles. In Chile, the plants’ seeds are roasted and used as a substitute for coffee. The dark red berries can be eaten raw or cooked; their flavor becomes more tart when the berries are cooked.

▼ *Ugni molinae*  
CHILEAN GUAVA

Hardy evergreen shrub. Height up to 8 ft (2.5 m) and spread 5 ft (1.5 m). Pretty, pale pink flowers appear in summer, followed by round fruits, which ripen to a very dark red. The small, dark green leaves are leathery in texture and aromatic. In the fall, they may turn a slightly coppery color.



**Leaf** is shiny on the upper surface, matte on the underside

**Flowers** are pale pink, cup-shaped, and hang down

*Valeriana*

# Valerian VALERIANACEAE

The scent of the flowers is deliciously fragrant, but the fresh root, when dug up, has a pungent odor. Cats, however, find the smell of the root even more seductive than catnip (*Nepeta cataria*—see page 158), as do rats, so valerian root can be used as an enticing bait in rat traps as a chemical-free alternative to poison. Medicinally, valerian is a well-known sedative and, combined with other herbs as a tea, tablet, or tincture, makes a good remedy for insomnia and restlessness. Do not take for an extended period or during pregnancy.



**Root** merges into a short conical root stock. When broken, the root releases a strong, rather unpleasant aroma. This is the medicinal part of the plant.

## How to grow

| Herb             | Soil | Propagation |
|------------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Valeriana</i> | Loam | Seed        |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in spring and place in a cold frame; germination takes three to four weeks. Plant out 24 in (60 cm) apart, when seedlings are large enough to handle. Alternatively, sow into prepared open ground in late spring. Leave uncovered, when the air temperature is above 48°F (9°C). Divide established plants in the fall and replant in a well-prepared site.

**SITE** Choose the site carefully to avoid having to move the plant at a later date; the scent of broken roots will attract cats. Plant in sun or partial shade, but keep the roots cool and damp in summer. It will grow well next to a pond. Valerian is a good companion plant for vegetables because the roots stimulate phosphorus and earthworm activity. Valerian also grows well in a large container placed in partial shade. Use a soil-based substrate and water regularly to keep the soil moist.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back after flowering to prevent self-seeding. Place the leaves on the compost heap—they are rich in minerals.

**HARVESTING** Dig up the roots of a second- or third-year plant for drying.

## How to use

Historically, this medicinal herb has been used as a sedative and relaxant. The roots, prepared into tablet, powder, capsule, or tincture form, are a safe, nonaddictive relaxant that reduces anxiety and promotes sleep. In the garden, spray an infusion of the root onto the topsoil to attract earthworms.

**CAUTION** Do not take for an extended period or during pregnancy.

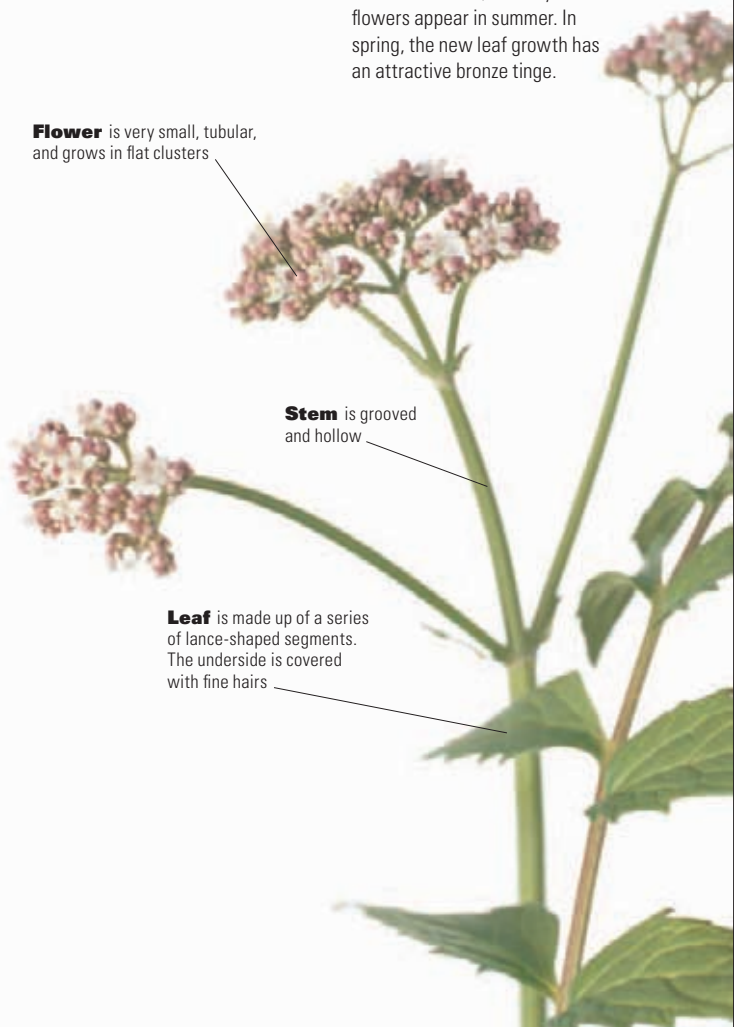
### ▼ *Valeriana officinalis* VALERIAN, ALL HEAL

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 4 ft (1.2 m) and spread 3 ft (1 m). Clusters of small, sweetly scented flowers appear in summer. In spring, the new leaf growth has an attractive bronze tinge.

**Flower** is very small, tubular, and grows in flat clusters

**Stem** is grooved and hollow

**Leaf** is made up of a series of lance-shaped segments. The underside is covered with fine hairs





Verbena

# Vervain

VERBENACEAE

Although the flowers of this insignificant-looking herb have no fragrance, and it is bitter to taste, vervain contains important medicinal properties. The ancient Greeks attributed magical properties to it and wore amulets made from vervain flowers and leaves to protect themselves against demons and disease. In contemporary society, vervain is used by herbalists as an effective natural remedy to relieve nervous tension and anxiety. Take care not to confuse vervain (*Verbena officinalis*) with lemon verbena (*Aloysia triphylla*—see page 85).

**CAUTION** Do not take during pregnancy.

## How to grow

| Herb           | Soil | Propagation |
|----------------|------|-------------|
| <i>Verbena</i> | Sand | Division    |

**PROPAGATION** The seeds of this herb need stratification before germination (see page 45). In cold climates, sow the seed into a pot and place outside for the winter; germination takes four to six months. In warm climates, first place the seeds in the refrigerator for one month to stratify them, then sow in a pot or tray and place outside. Germination is erratic, so be patient. Once large enough to handle, leave the seedlings in pots outside and then plant out 12 in (30 cm) apart. Divide established plants in the fall or spring, replanting into a prepared site.

**SITE** Plant in any well-drained soil in sun or partial shade. Vervain plants will adapt to clay soils. To increase its visual impact, plant in groups against a dark backdrop like a hedge to help to show off the flowers. It will grow in containers, using a soil-based substrate.

**MAINTENANCE** Cut back after flowering to prevent self-seeding. To maintain healthy leaf growth, divide established plants in the fall or spring every third year.

**HARVESTING** Fresh vervain leaves can be harvested throughout the growing season. For drying, harvest the flowers in summer.

### ► *Verbena officinalis*

VERVAIN, HERB OF GRACE

Hardy herbaceous perennial. Height up to 36 in (90 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). Tiny terminal clusters of very pale lilac flowers appear in summer. Its green leaves are often deeply divided into lobes with curved teeth.

## How to use

An important medicinal herb, vervain is used by Western and Chinese herbalists to treat nervous exhaustion, headaches, and liver and urinary tract infections. It can be administered as a medicinal tea, but this is very bitter.



Viola

# Viola

VIOLACEAE

These small wild pansies with their cheerful faces that always turn to face the sun are a delight in any garden. Violas are a wildflower, and can be found throughout North America, Europe, and Australia. They were made famous by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Many references are made to violas in romantic literature because they were often used to make love potions or send messages. Each color represented a different sentiment, according to the language of flowers: purple violas symbolized memories; white violas, loving thoughts; and yellow violas, souvenirs.

**CAUTION** High doses can cause nausea and vomiting.

## How to grow

| Herb         | Soil | Propagation   |
|--------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Viola</i> | Loam | Seed/division |

**PROPAGATION** Sow seeds in the fall. Do not cover with substrate and place in a cold frame for the winter; germination will occur by the following spring. Once large enough to handle, plant out 6 in (15 cm) apart. Divide established plants in the fall, replanting in a prepared site.

**SITE** Violas are self-seeding and adapt to most soil type, but dislike waterlogged sites. They favor sun or partial shade. They grow well in containers, on their own or with other herbs. Use a soil-based substrate in the container of your choice.

**MAINTENANCE** Deadhead flowers and pinch out growing tips to maintain flowering throughout the season. Cut back in the fall to encourage new growth and to help the plant survive the winter months.

**HARVESTING** Pick fresh flowers throughout the season. In summer, pick the flowering parts for use in infusions or for drying.

## How to use

Medicinally, violas are used as a detoxifying herb to treat arthritis, pertussis, bronchitis, and skin diseases. An infusion made from the flowers, leaves, and stems will soothe itchy skin. An infusion of the flowers only has long been prescribed for mending a broken heart. It is also beneficial when added to a bath for easing aches and pains. A cold infusion of the flowers, leaves, and stems is diluted in drinking water and given to racing pigeons to help them fly faster.



◀ *Viola odorata*  
SWEET VIOLET

Hardy perennial. Height 6 in (15 cm) and spread 12 in (30 cm). White, dark purple, and occasionally yellow sweetly scented flowers appear from late winter until mid-spring. The leaves are often a broad heart shape.



**Flower** petals can vary in color from blue, yellow, white, purple and black

◀ *Viola tricolor*  
HEARTSEASE, WILD PANSY

Hardy perennial that is often grown as an annual, since it produces the most flowers in the first year. Height and spread 15 in (38 cm). Small, edible, tricolored, pansylike flowers with blue, yellow, white, purple, and black petals appear throughout the summer until the first frosts. The leaves are heart-shaped or oval.

**Leaf** becomes narrower and smaller higher up the flowering stem



*Vitex*

# Chase tree VERBENACEAE

This aromatic shrub, indigenous to the Mediterranean and Central Asia, has been used medicinally for thousands of years. *Vitex agnus castus* translates as “chaste lamb,” which is the Christian symbol of purity. In the 4th century BC, Hippocrates used *Vitex* to treat female disorders, particularly diseases of the uterus. The common name, chaste tree, comes from the plant’s ancient reputation for guarding chastity. Historically, the Christian monks chewed the leaves and ground the dried berries over their food to reduce their libido, which gave rise to its local name, “monk’s pepper.”

## How to grow

| Herb         | Soil | Propagation       |
|--------------|------|-------------------|
| <i>Vitex</i> | Loam | Softwood cuttings |

**PROPAGATION** Sow fresh seeds in autumn into prepared plug module trays or small containers, using a seed substrate mixed in equal parts with perlite. Place the container in a frost-free environment for the winter, and pot up rooted seedlings in the following spring. Cuttings are the most reliable method of propagation: take softwood cuttings in late spring to early summer from non-flowering shoots. Place the cuttings in a sheltered, warm environment; they do not need bottom heat. Once rooted, pot up and winter in a frost-free environment for the first two winters. Plants will flower in the second or third summer.

**SITE** Plant in a fertile soil. *Vitex* will tolerate dry and moist soils but not cold, heavy clay soils. In cold areas, plant against a south- or west-facing wall; the wall will help cut the rainfall by 25 percent, and will give added protection and warmth in winter. Alternatively, plant in full sun in a sheltered position; it will not tolerate shade. This is a good late nectar plant for butterflies.

**MAINTENANCE** In spring, prune back last year’s growth to 2 in (5 cm), to encourage new growth and maintain the shape of the plant.

**HARVESTING** The leaves are picked in early summer for use fresh, or for drying. The fruits are harvested in fall for use fresh or for drying. However this plant rarely sets fruit in cool, cold climates.

## How to use

In the kitchen, the dried berries can be used in Moroccan dishes and in a spice mixture called *ras el hanout*. Medicinally, the berries are taken in tablet or tincture form to treat menstrual and menopausal problems and infertility. It is also used to relieve spasms of pain, especially PMS.



▲ *Vitex agnus-castus*

CHASE TREE, MONK’S PEPPER, HEMPTREE, AGNUS CASTUS, CHASTE BERRY

Deciduous shrub. Height and spread 8 ft (2.5 m). Upright panicles of fragrant, tubular, violet-blue flowers appear in late summer until mid-autumn, and are followed by small, round, orange-red fruit. It has dark green, aromatic leaves, divided into five or seven lance-shaped leaflets.





# THE KITCHEN

# Using herbs in cooking

My enthusiasm for using herbs to flavor food follows a long family tradition: in the 1950s, my grandmother, Ruth Lowinsky, wrote several cookbooks. My mother not only inherited her mother's love of cooking, but was also an avid gardener, growing all her own vegetables and herbs; I was inspired by her, and have followed suit by setting up my herb farm. In the beginning, I grew only a limited selection of culinary herbs because at the time there was little public demand for anything other than parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme, chives, tarragon, and fennel.

## Herbs in history

Today, tastes have moved on, and I produce a far more exotic, strongly flavored selection of herbs in my garden, which are becoming as common in the kitchen as the standard ones. I believe the increase in the use of pungent herbs in modern cooking has a lot to do with people's desire to counter the bland flavor of the intensively farmed foods and mass-produced, prepared, and frozen meals that have become so common. But, as the organic movement gathers momentum and locally grown and seasonal food becomes more popular, the future of good, flavorful food is looking much brighter.



**Use your home-grown herbs** and cook with fresh, organic ingredients for aromatic, delicious results.

Herbs, particularly home-grown herbs, are part of this desire to use fresh and simple ingredients.

Historically, herbs were used in the kitchen both for flavoring and as preservatives. Before refrigerators were invented, large households had underground cellars and cold rooms where they stored meat, which was covered in salt and wrapped in fresh sage leaves to preserve it. After shooting, fresh game was also left to hang to tenderize the meat with bunches of fresh thyme, which added flavor and imparted antiseptic properties to the meat to help prevent stomach upsets when it was eventually eaten.

## Cooking with fresh herbs

Herbs have always been a part of the cooking process. Traditionally, they were used with all forms of cooked or preserved food to add flavor or other benefits. When you cook with fresh herbs, they release a wonderful aroma, which not only smells fantastic but also makes your mouth water; this release of saliva actually helps prepare your stomach for food, hence the old saying "whet the appetite." Classic herbs like thyme, sage, oregano, and rosemary are highly aromatic when cooked; they are also strongly antiseptic and help with the digestion of fatty foods especially meats such as lamb. This goes some way toward explaining the tradition of preparing food with herbs—a tradition that continues to increase in popularity today.





◀◀ **Fresh sage leaves**

(*Salvia officinalis*) are gathered from the herb garden for use in cooking.

◀ **Fresh mint leaves**

(*Mentha*) are excellent with acid fruit, especially strawberries.



◀◀ **Sprigs of fresh thyme**

(*Thymus vulgaris*) are laid over vegetables in preparation for roasting.

◀ **Basil leaves**

(*Ocimum basilicum*) picked from a pot on the windowsill are delicious with summer dishes.



◀◀ **An herb dressing**

made from mint (*Mentha spicata*) and hyssop leaves (*Hyssopus officinalis*) is poured over an herb leaf salad.

◀ **A gruyère tart**

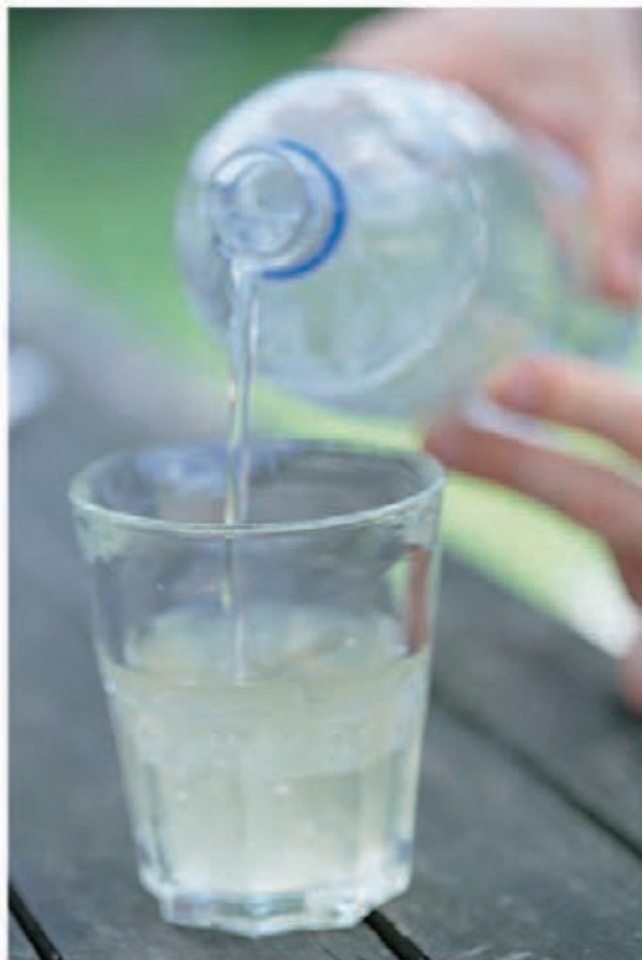
is flavored with freshly chopped tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*), parsley (*Petroselinum crispum* 'French'), and fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*).

# Hot and cold drinks

There are many different hot and cold drinks that can be made from herbs. Herb teas, known as tisanes, can be drunk instead of ordinary tea, and can provide a simple and helpful supplement to the daily diet. One of my favorite herb teas is lemon verbena, which is refreshing when served hot or cold either on a summer's day or at the end of the day for a good night's sleep.

An herb drink is one of the best ways of extracting both the medicinal properties of the herb and its aroma and flavor. Tisanes (herb teas) usually have a light flavor; they can be made with fresh or dried herbs. Dried herbs are more pungent and intense; however, if the herbs are dried in poor conditions or stored incorrectly, their flavor

may be impaired. For a light, all-round flavor I recommend using fresh herbs, especially when in season. But remember, you need to use more fresh herbs than dried—fresh herbs are less concentrated because they still contain moisture in their plant parts. For advice on harvesting and drying herbs, see pages 66–73.



## Elderflower cordial

**Makes 2 x 17 fl oz (500 ml) bottles**

2 pt (1.2 liters) water  
4 lb (1.8 kg) unrefined cane sugar  
6 lemons, juice and peeled rind  
2 tbsp (30ml) of dry cider or  
white wine vinegar  
20 heads of elderflower

**METHOD** Pour boiled water into a sterilized container. Add the sugar, stirring until dissolved. Cool. Add the lemon rind, lemon juice, white wine vinegar, and elderflowers. Cover with a cheesecloth and leave to infuse for 24 hours. Strain the cordial through cheesecloth and pour into glass bottles with metal-levered caps. Once made, leave the cordial for two weeks. Then serve chilled, diluted with still or sparkling water to taste. Store in a cool, dark place. Use within three months.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Lovage seeds** add a celery flavor. Once the sugar has dissolved, add 1 oz (25 g) seeds. Use cider vinegar, not white wine.

**Meadowsweet leaves** add a warm herb flavor. Use four leaves.

**Sweet cicely flowers** have a light anise taste. Use 16 flowerheads.

## Tisanes

5 fresh leaves, a 2 in (5 cm) sprig,  
2 tsp of dried herb,  
or 1 tsp of seeds per cup of boiled water.

**METHOD** Place the herb on a paper towel, lightly crush, and then add to the cup. Pour on the boiled water that has been cooled to just below boiling. Cover the infusion to prevent the herb leaf oils, which are medicinally beneficial, from evaporating in the steam. Leave to infuse for 5 minutes. Strain if necessary. Tisanes may be sweetened with honey to taste. The teapot (right) contains lemon verbena leaves—a late-night tisane that aids sleep—and the tea cup, a sprig of rosemary—a refreshing morning pick-me-up.



### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Chamomile flower** tisane is lovely last thing at night to aid sleep.

**Dill seed** tisane is useful for calming gas pains in the abdomen.

**Lemon balm leaf** tisane is a mild antidepressant and relieves headaches.

**Peppermint leaf** tisane drunk after a meal aids digestion.

## Borage ice cubes

10 fresh borage flowers

**METHOD** Pick the fresh flowers when they are fully open. To keep the ice cube clear, use boiled water that has been left to cool. Fill the ice tray with the water, then add a single flower to each section. If you find the flowers difficult to handle, use a pair of tweezers to place the flowers in the ice-cube tray. Leave to set in the freezer. These flower cubes look pretty in drinks and added to fruit salads, or simply as decoration in an ice bucket.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Chicory flowers**, a lovely blue flower. Pick when fully open.

**Heartsease flowers** look lovely in fruit salads.

**Pineapple sage flowers**, a stunning red flower that looks magnificent in cocktails.

**Primrose flowers**, a charming yellow flower.





# Salads and vinegars

Fresh herbs can be added to all types of mixed leaf salads and offer perhaps the best way to experience the unique flavor and fragrance of the herb along with the benefits of its medicinal properties. Chive, caraway, and basil leaves, for example, aid digestion, while chervil is high in vitamin C, and parsley is rich in iron.

To obtain the most intense flavor from fresh herbs in salad and their optimum medicinal qualities, it is best to use organically grown herbs. In growing herbs organically, the sun, rain, and soil have all worked to boost their natural oil content. Personally, I find that

pot-grown supermarket herbs, grown on artificial nutrients under glass to encourage fast growth, can lack taste and fragrance. In salads, limit yourself to no more than five herb leaves, or the flavors may become confused.



## Herb flower salad

Heart's ease flowers, green parts removed

Fennel flowers

Painted sage flowers and bracts

Wild arugula flowers

**METHOD** Make the herb leaf salad (opposite) and decorate with edible herb flowers. Before adding the flowers to the leaf salad, remove all the flower parts from their stems. Add the flowers to the salad; toss and serve. You can use a very light mild dressing made from olive oil and white wine vinegar, but do not add more herbs to the dressing or it will overpower the flower flavors.

## Mint vinaigrette

3 tbsp (45 ml) mild olive oil

1 tbsp (15 ml) white wine or balsamic vinegar

Pinch of sea salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 tsp (5 ml) wholegrain mustard

1 tsp (5 ml) honey or soft brown sugar

Handful spearmint leaves, chopped

**METHOD** Place the oil and vinegar in a bowl and whisk together. Add all the remaining ingredients and blend. Taste to check the seasoning, then pour over the salad. Toss the leaves and serve. This simple mint vinaigrette is suitable for green leaf and apple salads.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Chive flowers** add an onion flavor to salads.

**Nasturtium flowers** have a peppery taste.

**Pot marigold flowers** offer a mild, warm flavor.

**Wild bergamot flowers** add a strong herb flavor to salads.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Chive and mint leaf** vinaigrette for potato salad

**Dill leaf** vinaigrette for zucchini.

**Garlic and sweet marjoram leaf** vinaigrette for tomato salad.

**Tarragon and sweet basil leaf** vinaigrette for cold fish.

## Herb leaf salad

Use a generous handful of:

Buckler leaf sorrel

Chervil

Purslane

Salad burnet

Wild arugula

**METHOD** This herb leaf salad presents a lovely mix of flavors. The buckler leaf sorrel has a sharp, clean taste; salad burnet offers a hint of cucumber; chervil tastes of mild anise; wild arugula has a peppery edge, and purslane contributes a fresh pealike flavor. This selection of herbs works well served with fish, or as an appetizer to cleanse the palate. A wide range of leafy herbs can be used in a mixed salad and some other good alternatives are featured (right). Wash and dry the leaves before use if you do not know their place of origin. If home-grown, simply place the leaves in a salad bowl, since it is thought that water impairs their flavor.



### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Chive leaves and flowers** have an onion flavor that combines beautifully with salad burnet, purslane, and chervil.

**French parsley leaves** have a strong flavor that works well

mixed with salad arugula, sorrel, and purslane.

**Summer savory leaves** have a peppery flavor that mixes well with salad burnet, chervil, and purslane.

## Herb vinegar

1 pt (575 ml) white wine vinegar

2 handfuls of fresh tarragon leaves

**METHOD** This is a wonderful way to infuse vinegar with the fresh flavor of your home-grown herbs.

■ Fill a clean glass bottle full of fresh tarragon leaves. Make sure that they are packed in tight to the top of the container. Top up the bottle with white wine vinegar and seal. Do not use a metal top because vinegar is corrosive.

■ Leave on a sunny windowsill for one month, shaking from time to time, so that the tarragon leaves can infuse the vinegar with their flavor. Strain the liquid through unbleached coffee filter paper. Put a sprig of tarragon in the bottle for identification purposes.

■ For those who do not want to wait, here is a quicker method: put the herbs and vinegar in a covered ceramic bowl over a pan of cold water. Bring the water to a boil to heat up the vinegar and infuse it with the tarragon leaf flavor. Then, remove the bowl from the pan. Leave it to cool for about two hours before using. You can infuse vinegar with almost any herb using either one of these simple methods. Tarragon vinegar is good for making salad dressing and sauces for white meat such as fish or chicken.



### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Dill leaves and seeds** make a vinegar that is wonderful for homemade gravalax. Use at least one teaspoon of crushed dill seeds.

**Hyssop and spearmint leaves** are good in sauces with vegetables or for making flavored mustards.

**Purple shiso leaves and caraway seeds** are lovely in dressings for rice or pasta salads. The purple shiso turns the vinegar a wonderful purple color, and the caraway seeds add a slight aniseed taste. Use four teaspoons of seeds and two handfuls of leaves.

**Wild bergamot leaves** are very pungent. Use this vinegar for making pickles, sauces, and mustards.

# Mayonnaises, mustards, & butters

In my opinion, there is nothing to beat the flavor of homemade preserves, and each of these recipes will contribute to a meal. One of my first cooking memories is helping my mother chop herbs to make an herb butter to accompany grilled lamb cutlets. Equally, I remember my mother watching transfixed while I made an herb mayonnaise with a food processor—what took her hours, took me minutes.

My mouth waters at the thought of a homemade mayonnaise that has been blended with freshly harvested herbs to make a traditional, green mayonnaise. Depending on the herbs you grow, mayonnaises can be made to match many different dishes. I also find mustards indispensable as an

accompaniment: they liven up sausages, and are great folded into a crème fraîche. Herb butters are not only a wonderful way to preserve the flavor of fresh herb leaves and flowers, but can also transform dishes—toss freshly cooked pasta in a sage butter for a quintessentially Italian alternative to a store-bought sauce.

## Herb mayonnaise

2 large egg yolks (at room temperature)  
1 tsp (5 ml) English mustard powder  
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
1¼ cups (275 ml) light olive oil or sunflower oil  
1–2 tsp (5–10 ml) white wine vinegar, to taste  
½ tsp (2.5 ml) lemon juice  
1 bunch parsley, finely chopped  
2 sprigs fresh basil, finely chopped

**METHOD** Place the egg yolks, mustard, and salt in a bowl, and mix together. Add the oil, very slowly, one drop at a time, whisking until it starts to thicken. When half the oil has been added, add one teaspoon of white wine vinegar to thin the mixture. Now add the oil in a thin stream, whisking continuously. If the mixture is too thin, add a little more oil. When you are happy with the consistency, add the lemon juice, chopped herbs, salt and pepper to taste, and a little more white wine vinegar, if needed. Leave the mixture to infuse for an hour to bring out the herb flavors. Then use immediately—chopped basil leaves combined with vinegar may turn black on exposure to air.



### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Chervil leaves** create a delicate-flavored mayonnaise that is good with rice dishes.

**Garlic clove** mayonnaise is wonderful with fish, and great with French fries.

**French tarragon leaf** mayonnaise is good with fish, chicken, and rice.

**Sorrel leaves** make another classic green mayonnaise that goes well with fish and cold chicken.

**Wild arugula leaves** add a peppery, beefy flavor, which combines well with new potatoes or egg dishes.



## Herb mustard

⅓ cup (80 g) black mustard seed  
 ⅓ cup (30 g) white mustard seed  
 2 cups (500 ml) water  
 ½ cup (115 g) English mustard powder  
 ¾ cup (200 ml) cider vinegar  
 1 tsp (5 ml) salt  
 1 tsp (5 ml) turmeric  
 ¼ cup (50 g) chopped dill

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Horseradish root** is wonderful with red meat. Add 2 tablespoons of grated root to ¼ cup (50 g) of coarse-grain and ¼ cup (50 g) smooth mustard.

**Oregano leaves** taste good with goat's cheese and tomatoes. Add ⅓ cup (25 g) of chopped leaves to the mustard mix given above.

**METHOD** Place the mustard seed in a china or glass bowl, add the water, and soak for 24 hours. Then add the mustard powder, cider vinegar, salt, and turmeric. When thoroughly mixed, place the bowl over a saucepan of water, but do not allow the bottom of the bowl to touch the water. Using a low heat, gently cook the mustard seed for four hours, stirring occasionally. Check that the water in the saucepan does not evaporate, and do not let the mixture boil or the mustard will lose its flavor and become bitter. Once cooked, let it cool and add the chopped dill. Cover and keep in the refrigerator. Alternatively, you can cheat and simply mix together ¼ cup (50 g) of good-quality coarse-grain mustard and ¼ cup (50 g) of smooth Dijon mustard with ¼ cup (50 g) chopped dill. If the mustard is too thick, add a small amount of white wine vinegar to thin it.



## Herb butter

2 tbsp thyme leaves, chopped  
 4 oz (125 g) unsalted butter

**METHOD** Remove the leaves of the thyme by rubbing your fingers up and down the stems. Once removed, chop up to release the leaf oils, then mix with the soft unsalted butter. It is important to use unsalted butter so that the herb flavor will come through. Use a fork to blend the herbs and butter. When thoroughly mixed, pack the butter into a roll of waxed paper and place in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours to set. The longer you leave it, the better the flavor.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Coriander leaf and garlic clove** butter can be rubbed over trout before grilling. Use 1 tbsp chopped coriander leaf and two cloves of garlic.

**Dill leaf** butter is ideal for salmon. Use one handful of dill leaf, chopped.

**Parsley and lemon thyme leaf** butter can be pushed under the skin of a chicken before roasting. Use 2 tbsp of chopped herb leaves.

**Rose-scented geranium leaf** butter is excellent for making cakes. Use three leaves, chopped.

**Sage leaf** butter is great for using on grilled pork chops. Use three leaves, chopped.

**Spearmint leaf and elderflower** butter is very good for making a sweet sauce for ice cream. Use 1 tbsp of chopped spearmint leaf and two heads of elderflower.

# Sauces and marinades

Fresh herbs are ideal in sauces, giving color, texture, and flavor. Simply by warming the sauce, the natural oils contained in the leaves of the herbs are released, and will infuse the sauce with their flavors. A good sauce can transform a simple pasta or rice dish, and liven up grilled fish or meat. Herbs can equally be used to flavor and perfume sweet sauces, such as the aromatic herb custard below.

In Europe, sweet cicely was considered a natural sugar and was used as a sweetener for custards and puddings and to counteract sharp fruit flavors, such as gooseberry, rhubarb, and strawberry. In India, cardamom is still used to flavor rice pudding, and is combined with fennel seeds to make a sweet pancake syrup.

A marinade will tenderize and give flavor to meat, fish, or vegetables before they are cooked or served chilled. This marinating time will also endow the food with the herbs' beneficial properties: for example, oregano, sage, or thyme will work as an antiseptic. Most marinades also contain an acid ingredient, which acts as the tenderizer.



## Herb custard

2½ cups (560ml) milk  
5 bay leaves  
6 egg yolks  
⅓ cup (85g) white sugar

**METHOD** Place the bay leaves and milk in a pan and bring to a boil to infuse the milk with the herb flavor. Whisk the egg yolk and sugar together until they change color from a deep gold to pale yellow. Pour in the hot milk and bay leaves. Stir over the heat in a double boiler for ten minutes until the custard thickens. Take the pan off the heat, remove the leaves, and pour it into a cold pitcher. Serve with summer fruits.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Cardamom seed** custard is delicious served with hot dried fruit compote. Use 2 tsp of ground cardamom seeds.

**Scented pelargonium** leaf custard is lemon flavored. Serve with fresh apricots. Use four pelargonium leaves, whole.



## Herb pesto

1 tbsp pine nuts  
 4 tbsp chopped sweet rocket leaves  
 (alternatively, try using basil, chervil, or coriander)  
 2 cloves of garlic, chopped  
 3 oz (75 g) parmesan cheese  
 6 tbsp sunflower or olive oil  
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper

**METHOD** Blend the pine nuts, herb leaves, and chopped garlic cloves in a food processor or blender until smooth. Add the oil slowly, a little at a time, continuing to blend until you have a smooth, thick paste. Add salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. The pesto can be served with cooked pasta or rice, or spread on bruschetta. It will keep in a sealed container for a week if covered with a thin layer of oil, or can be frozen and used within a month.

## Herb fish marinade

1 lb (500 g) cod filet or other meaty white fish  
 For the marinade  
 1 cup (200 ml) white wine vinegar  
 Juice of 1 lemon and juice of 1 lime  
 1 tbs sea salt  
 2 garlic cloves, sliced  
 2 handfuls of finely chopped parsley, dill, lemon thyme, mint, and basil

**METHOD** Mix all the marinade ingredients together. Slice the fish into ½ in (2.5 cm) pieces and place in a shallow glass or ceramic dish. Pour in the marinade, cover the dish with a lid, and refrigerate for four hours, turning the fish every half an hour so that it is completely saturated in marinade liquid. Drain the fish and pour over an herb vinaigrette (see page 222). Toss the fish with the herbs of your choice, return covered to the refrigerator, and leave for one hour. Serve chilled with salad and crusty bread.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Chives, chervil, salad burnet, and fennel leaves** can be finely chopped and added to this marinade in any combination.





# Cooked dishes

There is nothing more comforting than to enter a house and be greeted by the aroma of a casserole being cooked with fresh herbs, or vegetables being roasted with herbs and olive oil. This is how food should be cooked and enjoyed, for the pleasure of family and friends. Herbs are well suited to this slow style of cooking because it allows time for the herbs to add fragrance and flavor to the dish.

A bouquet garni is the classic herb flavoring for casseroles and stews, but many other herbs also work well in cooked dishes, and some also have marvellous medicinal benefits. Fennel and tarragon impart a delicious aniseed taste, and also work medicinally to help break down cholesterol in the

bloodstream. Chives thin the blood and help improve metabolism. The addition of herbs to recipes like the herb and gruyère flan recipe outlined below will also aid the digestion of cheese and eggs, which some people find difficult. By using herbs in cooking, you not only create a wonderful meal, but a healthy one as well.

## Herb flan

12 oz (350 g) pastry, prepared or your own recipe

12 oz (350 g) gruyère cheese

2 cups (500 ml) soured cream

3 large eggs

salt and pepper, to taste

1 tsp (5 ml) brown sugar

1 clove garlic, crushed

2 handfuls each of finely chopped tarragon, parsley, and fennel

**METHOD** Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Finely grate half of the gruyère cheese and finely dice the other half. Roll out the pastry and line a metal cake pan 11 in (28 cm) in diameter. Refrigerate for one hour so the pastry does not shrink during cooking. Place the diced gruyère on the pastry shell. To make the filling, beat all the other ingredients together and pour into the pastry shell. Bake for 40 minutes, turning occasionally so the top of the flan does not burn. Serve immediately or at room temperature with a sharp salad and herb vinaigrette (see page 222) to counteract the rich taste.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**French parsley, chives, and sweet marjoram**—use two handfuls of each herb.

**Mint, rosemary, and French parsley**—use two handfuls of each herb.

**Summer savory, hyssop, and dill**—use two handfuls of hyssop and dill, but less summer savory, which has a strong flavor.





## Bouquet garni

1 bunch of parsley  
3 sprigs of thyme  
1 clove of garlic, peeled  
2–3 bay leaves

**METHOD** Tie the herbs together with a long piece of string, so that they can easily be removed from the casserole or stew at the end of cooking. Alternatively, tie the herbs in a small cloth bag attached to a long piece of string. Add the bouquet garni at the start and leave in the dish for two hours.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**For fish:** fennel, lemon balm, French parsley, and sweet marjoram.

**For meat:** oregano, thyme, bay, and lovage; rosemary, sage, thyme, and parsley; thyme, sage, parsley, and bay.

**For poultry:** parsley, tarragon, chervil, and myrtle; bay, lemon

thyme, lemon balm, and lemon grass (the grass tips); rosemary, summer savory, hyssop, and bay.

**For wild game:** myrtle, bay, orange-scented thyme, and parsley; luma, juniper berries, garlic, and parsley; winter savory, thyme, sage, and oregano.

## Roasted vegetables with herbs

### Serves 4

2½ lb (1.25 kg) mixed root vegetables  
2–8 garlic cloves  
4 sprigs rosemary  
4 sprigs classic thyme  
salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste  
3 tbsp (15 ml) olive oil

**METHOD** Use the tough leaves from evergreen herbs like rosemary because soft green leaves will disintegrate at high roasting temperatures. Chop up your chosen vegetables, such as onions, potatoes, carrots, and parsnips. Place them on a baking sheet and scatter the herbs over them. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste, and drizzle with olive oil. Roast the vegetables in a preheated oven at 350°F (180°C) for 30–40 minutes. Turn the vegetables every 15 minutes.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Bay** leaves add a warm flavor. Use three to four leaves.

**Luma** sprigs add a rich spicy flavor. Use two sprigs.

**Myrtle** add a warm spicy flavor. Use four sprigs.

**Winter savory** leaves add a peppery flavor. Use eight sprigs.







# THE HOME

# Using herbs in the home

Today, in our busy and industrial world, using herbs in the home as natural alternatives to chemical cleaning products, for first aid, or simply to pamper yourself is, I am pleased to say, experiencing a revival—not only is it beneficial for you and your family, it is also very beneficial for the environment in which you live. If you grow herbs in the garden, herbal products are not only healthy, but inexpensive and fun to make. Marigold cream (see page 240) and rosemary oil (see page 241) are classic examples, and also make great presents for your friends and family.

## Herbal uses

Historically, herbs were central to the household, where they were used not only to flavor and preserve food but to sweeten and purify the air. Herbs were woven into roof thatch, scattered over floors, used to clean and polish furniture and ornaments, and to disinfect kitchen utensils and work surfaces. Although in the developed world the use and knowledge of herbs has decreased, in the third world, from the Amazon rain forests to the remote mountains of north Thailand, herbs are an important part of daily life.



**Animals** can benefit from herbal remedies as much as we can (see pages 246–247 for recipes and ideas).

## Herbs as medicine

Traditionally, herbs have long been used as medicine for people and livestock. A basic herbal first-aid kit is useful to have in the home for treating minor ailments: herbs like aloe can be rubbed onto minor burns to relieve the pain, and a cup of herbal tea at the end of the day aids relaxation and helps sleep. Using herbs medicinally for more serious complaints is a complex issue, and self-treatment is not recommended. When I am sick, I consult a fully trained herbalist or a physician. When taking herbs internally, it is important to remember that they are the foundation of all our manufactured medicine, and many contain potent medicinal properties and should be treated with the greatest respect. My animals also benefit from being treated for minor ailments with herbs, which make their coats glossy and their temperaments relaxed.

## Herbs for relaxation

One of my favorite uses for herbs in the home is in the bath (see pages 244–245 for some of my favorite herbal bath recipes). Not only do herbs smell wonderful when they are infused in warm bathwater, but they also help relieve the aches and pains that accumulate after a day of physical work on the farm. I am also a great believer in herbal footbaths, infused with lavender and bay, lovage, or sweet marjoram, to soothe tired feet, and herbal pillows filled with hops or lavender (see page 245) to aid sleep and relaxation at night.



◀◀ **Water infused** with fresh or dried lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) makes a fragrant, natural room spray for the home.

◀ **Fresh tansy leaves** (*Tanacetum vulgare*) rubbed into a dog's coat will deter fleas.



◀◀ **Lemon verbena leaves** (*Aloysia triphylla*) mixed with vinegar, water, and liquid soap make an effective natural window cleaner.

◀ **Dried sprigs of southernwood** (*Artemisia abrotanum*) are a good moth repellent. Place them between sheets and clothes in drawers and closets.



◀◀ **Lemon balm leaves** (*Melissa officinalis*) and beeswax make a wonderful natural furniture polish with a fresh lemon scent.

◀ **Aloe gel** (*Aloe vera*) is a good natural remedy for soothing sunburn, minor burns, and insect bites.



# Herbs for furniture and fabrics

There is nothing better for cleaning and restoring wooden furniture than a good old-fashioned beeswax polish, scented with fresh herbs. Soapwort shampoo is wonderful for cleaning curtains or delicate upholstery fabrics. The gentle cleansing power of the plant's saponins (see page 191) makes this natural shampoo ideal, and because of its cleansing properties, soapwort is still used as the main ingredient in manufactured cleaning products.

Beeswax polish and soapwort shampoo are easy to make at home and offer a "green" alternative to commercial cleaning products, which contain a mixture of synthetics and chemicals. Natural products are not only better for your furniture but also for the health of

you and the rest of your family, especially if you have babies or toddlers at home. They are also gentle on your hands, and so not pollute the air or the waste water. In the following recipes, all the herbs smell wonderful, and also work as a mild antiseptic.



## Natural furniture polish

- 1¼ cups (275ml) water
- 1 large handful of fresh lemon balm
- 1¼ cups (275 ml) pure turpentine
- 2 oz (60 g) beeswax
- ½ cup (60 g) soapflakes
- 2 x 1 lb (500 g) screw-top cans

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

#### Lavender stems or sweet marjoram leaves

Use a large handful of dried herb or six drops of essential oil.

**METHOD** Make an herb infusion by placing the lemon balm leaves and stalks into a bowl. Boil the water and pour over the leaves. Cover and let it stand for 15 minutes. Melt the beeswax and turpentine in a mixing bowl over a saucepan of simmering water. Take care when heating beeswax and turpentine since it has a low flash (ignition) point. Place the strained infusion and soapflakes in another saucepan and heat gently. Cool both mixtures a little and then stir the two together to make a thick cream. Pour into two cans and seal. Use a soft cloth to apply the polish to wood, metal, or painted surfaces. Buff to a shine with a clean soft cloth.

## Upholstery shampoo

- 1 tbsp (15 g) dried or fresh root of soapwort or two handfuls of fresh stems
- 1 quart (750 ml) water

**METHOD** Wash the fresh soapwort root thoroughly in water. There is no need to peel it. If using dried soapwort root, prepare it by soaking in water overnight. Put the soapwort into a saucepan with the water. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes. Let it stand until cool. Strain the liquid into a bottle and store in the refrigerator. To use, dampen a sponge with the solution and rub the fabric lightly. Let it dry before applying again, if necessary. If you wish to perfume the shampoo, add six drops of essential oil to the strained liquid. Lavender, thyme, rosemary, or rose-scented geranium oil are all suitable.



# Herbs for surface cleaning

Using products made with herbs to clean surfaces will leave your home smelling delightfully fresh and fragrant, and they are just as effective as commercial cleaners. You can easily make these natural surface cleaners with just a few basic pantry ingredients, including fresh lemon, vinegar, baking soda, liquid soap, table salt, and fresh herbs.

There are several advantages: the ingredients are easy to obtain, they are inexpensive and have no damaging effects on the environment; they contain no additives, so are unlikely to cause allergic reactions; and they are not tested on animals. Instead, an all-purpose surface cleaner

(see below) can be made with 100 percent natural ingredients, and a handful of fresh sage leaves will add a natural disinfectant. Fresh lemon verbena leaves mixed with white wine vinegar, liquid soap, and water will help make your windows sparkle and smell fresh.

## All-purpose surface cleaner

Handful of fresh sage  
1¼ cups (300 ml) water  
2 tbsp (30 ml) baking soda  
8 drops lemon juice

**METHOD** Put the sage leaves and stems in a saucepan, add the water, cover, and bring to a boil. Once boiling, lower the heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from the heat. When the liquid is cool, strain through fine mesh to remove any impurities. Pour the cooled liquid into a bottle, add two tablespoons of baking soda and eight drops of lemon juice. Put a top on the bottle, and shake well. This liquid can be used to clean sinks, and bathroom and kitchen surfaces. Store this all-purpose cleaner in the refrigerator for up to one week.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Thyme sprigs**—Use two handfuls of the herb.

**Rosemary sprigs**—cut to fit into the saucepan. Use one handful.

## Window cleaner

1 handful lemon verbena leaves, either fresh or dried  
1 cup (230 ml) water  
2 tbsp (30 ml) white vinegar  
3–4 drops liquid soap

**METHOD** Put a handful of lemon verbena leaves in a saucepan, pour in the water, bring to a boil, and lower the heat to simmer. After ten minutes, turn off the heat and let it cool. Strain through fine mesh into a bottle. Add two tablespoons of white vinegar and a few drops of liquid soap. Seal and shake well. Store in a labeled spray bottle and use within three weeks. If you apply this solution to your window panes and then rub with an old newspaper, it will increase their shine.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Lemon balm leaves**  
Use one handful, fresh or dried.

**Wild bergamot leaves**  
Use one handful, fresh or dried.



# Herbs for home fragrance

Keeping your home fresh and sweet-smelling not only makes it a pleasant environment to live in, but can also help deter insects. For centuries, dried and fresh herbs have been used in the home to improve the air quality and add a wonderfully refreshing fragrance, and are far more beneficial than synthetic room sprays, which are particularly harmful to those who suffer from asthma and allergies.

In the Middle Ages, rosemary and majoram were strewn in doorways and, as they were crushed underfoot, they released their perfume and helped prevent the spread of disease. In Elizabethan times, ladies carried a “tussie-mussie,” made up of sweet-smelling herbs, to hide the odors of the street and to give protection from the

plague. Bunches of tansy leaves were hung in windows to repel flies, and mint sprigs were added to flower arrangements to repel mosquitoes. Like my grandmother, I still tuck sprigs of southernwood between wool clothes to deter moths, and every time I smell this herb, I am reminded of her.

## Herbal room spray

2 large handfuls of fresh lavender flowers  
or 1 large handful of dried lavender flowers  
or 10 drops of lavender essential oil  
½ pt (300 ml) water

**METHOD** Place the lavender flowers in a saucepan, add the water, cover, and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to simmering. Simmer for 15 minutes, then turn off the heat. Let the lavender cool in the water. Strain using a fine mesh to remove all impurities. Pour the clear liquid into a spray bottle, adding a fresh sprig of lavender to the strained liquid if desired. Alternatively, use the essential oil for a quicker recipe. Add it to cold water (hot water will cause the oils to evaporate). Shake the container well to mix the oil and water together. The scent from the essential oil is slightly sharper than fresh lavender sprigs.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Rose-scented geranium leaves**—Use either two large handful of leaves or ten drops of rose geranium essential oil.

**Sage leaves**—Use two large handful of leaves.



## Sweet basil leaf fly repellent

Place a sweet basil plant (*Ocimum basilicum*) by a window or just outside the kitchen door. If flies are persistent, crush a leaf to release a more pungent aroma.



## Herbal sachets for clothes drawers

1 handful of dried lavender flowers

**METHOD** Dry the lavender flowers on stretched fabric (see “Herb garden potpourri”, below). Loosely fill sachets with the flowers or leaves, taking care not to overfill. You can intensify the fragrance by adding a few drops of lavender essential oil. The scent of lavender perfumes clothes and repels moths.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Alecost leaves**—These have a warm, minty but camphorous scent when dried. Alecost is also a good moth repellent.

**Lemon verbena leaves**—The dried lemon-scented leaves make clothes smell wonderful.

**South African wild rosemary leaves**—These have an aroma similar to a mixture of southernwood and rosemary.



## Southernwood moth deterrent

Simply dry sprigs of southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*) on a stretched piece of cheesecloth (see below). When dry, lay whole branches between wool clothes to deter moths.

## Herb garden potpourri

- |                                       |                                     |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 6 tbsp peppermint or spearmint leaves | 1 tbsp thyme flowers and leaves     |
| 4 tbsp rosemary leaves                | 2 tsp coarse salt                   |
| 4 tbsp lemon balm leaves              | 2 tsp orris root powder             |
| 2 tbsp oregano flowers and leaves     | 1 tsp (5 ml) rosemary essential oil |
| 1 tbsp sage leaves                    | 1 tsp (5 ml) oregano essential oil  |
| 1 tbsp bay leaves                     |                                     |



**METHOD** Start by drying the leaves in single layers on a piece of cheesecloth stretched over a frame, as shown below. Dry the herbs in small batches; do not mix herb types because their drying times vary. Keep the frame in a warm, dry place out of direct sunlight. When each batch is dry and crisp, put the herbs in individual jars with tight-fitting lids. Before sealing the lids, sprinkle in two teaspoons coarse salt and two teaspoons of orris root powder. Put the sealed jars in a dark cabinet for three weeks. Mix all the dry ingredients in a bowl, sprinkle over the essential oils, and place in a room away from direct sunlight. Stir occasionally to allow the fragrance of the potpourri to perfume the room.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Incense plant flowers and bracts**—Use these on their own or mixed with bay leaves.

**Myrtle and juniper berries and cardamom pods**—this mix gives a spicy aroma.

# Herbs for first aid

Herbal remedies can provide quick, effective relief for a whole range of household accidents, from wasp stings to minor burns or sprains. Many of these can be treated by using the leaf picked straight from the plant. Aloe vera and pennyroyal, for example, are rubbed directly on the affected area. Other remedies take longer to prepare, but there is something very reassuring about homemade products. Before using any plant medicinally, do make sure it has been correctly identified. If you are in any doubt about using a herbal remedy, seek professional medical advice and always seek help for more serious accidents.

## Natural healing with herbs

I have aloe vera growing (see page 84) and the burn jelly plant (*Bulbine frutescens*—see page 95) growing in pots on my kitchen windowsill, because my clumsiness as a cook is well known. When I burn myself, I simply cut off a bit of leaf and rub the glutinous gel straight on the burn (see below), reapplying if the burn becomes uncomfortable. The burn then heals without blistering. Aloe vera and burn jelly plant gels are not only good for healing burns; they can be used to control acne and eczema, and to relieve itching caused by insect bites and allergies. In cool climates, the succulent leaves of houseleek (see page 194) can be used in the same way as aloe vera, as can St. John's Wort oil (see page 128). The mashed-up leaves of pennyroyal (see page 148) offer immediate relief from ant, mosquito, and horsefly bites. Lemon balm (see page 146) is also indispensable; an infusion of the leaves is a wonderful soother for cold sores.

## Herbal first-aid kit

A good first-aid kit needs to cater for all basic minor ailments including stings, scrapes, allergies, and sprains. Choose which natural herbal remedies from the following pages will suit you and your family's needs best, make them up, and keep them in your bathroom cabinet or refrigerator. Make sure you do not store any of the remedies for longer than the recommended time or they may lose their potency.



▲ **Aloe vera** plants will grow well in containers on a windowsill, which makes them ideal for use in the kitchen.



◀ **The beneficial gel** of the aloe vera plant is in the center of the leaf stem. It will stain, so take care to keep it away from clothing and other fabrics.



**Aloe** (*Aloe vera*) gel for cuts, burns, sunburn, or poison ivy. Use fresh from the plant or as a homemade gel (see page 241).

**Arnica** (*Arnica montana*) ointment for painful bruises and muscle pain. Only use when the skin is unbroken.

**Chamomile** (*Chamaemelum nobile*) dried flowers and leaves for an infusion to help sleep and relaxation. Chamomile cream is used to treat eczema and skin rashes (see pages 240–241).

**Comfrey** (*Symphytum officinale*) ointment for bruises and cuts. It encourages the growth of scar tissue (see page 240).

**Lavender** (*Lavandula angustifolia*) oil for insect bites, stings, burns, and headaches. It has antiseptic and antibacterial properties (see page 241).

**Marigold** (*Calendula officinalis*) as a cream for inflamed or minor wounds, skin rashes, and sunburn (see page 240).

**St. John's Wort** (*Hypericum perforatum*) oil for burns, scrapes, and rashes. This oil is a good substitute for aloe vera when traveling (see page 241 for a hot infused oil recipe). As a cream, it can be used to treat cramp and neuralgia (see page 240).

**Lemon balm** (*Melissa officinalis*) dried herb infusion for stomach upsets, and as a relaxant. It is a good herbal treatment for children (see pages 240–241 for infusion recipe).



# Herbal remedies

The recipes on this page show just a few of the ways in which your homegrown herbs can be used to create simple, natural, and effective herbal remedies. Marigold cream can be applied to minor wounds, skin rashes, or sunburn, for example. An herbal infusion is the simplest way to prepare the leaves or flowers of herbs as a remedy for specific ailments, or as a relaxing or revitalizing tea.

## Marigold cream

5 oz (150 g) emulsifying ointment

3 oz (70 g) glycerol

1/3 cup (80 ml) water

1 oz (30 g) dried marigold flowers (*Calendula officinalis*)  
or 3 oz (70 g) fresh whole flowers

**METHOD** Melt the ointment in a glass bowl over a pan of boiling water. Add the glycerol and water, and keep stirring until melted. Add the herb, stir well, and simmer for three hours; make sure it does not boil dry. Strain through a wine press or jelly bag set over a pitcher. Once strained, stir constantly to prevent separation. When set, fill a dark glass jar, cover, label, and store in the refrigerator for up to two months.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

The following creams are made from the flowering parts of the herb in exactly the same way as marigold cream.

**Chamomile** (*Chamaemelum nobile*) cream for eczema and other allergic skin conditions.

**St. John's Wort** (*Hypericum perforatum*) cream for cramp and neuralgia (the cream will be pink in color).

## Comfrey ointment

1 lb (500 g) petroleum jelly or soft paraffin wax

2 oz (60 g) dried or 5 oz (150 g) fresh comfrey leaves  
(*Symphytum officinale*) finely chopped

**METHOD** Melt the petroleum jelly in a glass bowl over a pan of boiling water. Add the leaves and simmer, stirring continuously for about an hour. Pour the mixture into a jelly bag or strainer. Wearing rubber gloves, squeeze the mixture through the bag into the pitcher. Pour the ointment into a jar before it sets. Place the lid on the jar, without securing it. When cool, tighten the lid. Store in a refrigerator for up to three months.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Arnica** (*Arnica montana*) for bruises, sprains, and chilblains. Use only on unbroken skin. Use the whole plant—flowers, leaves, and stalks—to make the ointment.

**Heartsease** (*Viola tricolor*) for skin rashes. Use the flowers, leaves, and stalks to make the ointment.



## Aloe gel

1 aloe vera leaf (*Aloe vera*), taken from the top of the plant (do not use the leaves at the base which are very bitter)

4 drops of lavender essential oil.

**METHOD** Peel the tough outer skin off the leaf using a potato peeler or paring knife. Extract the clear gelatinous gel and place it in a blender. For every  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup (50 ml) of gel, add 4 drops of lavender essential oil. Mix thoroughly. Pour the mixture into a glass jar or plastic-lined can, seal, and label. Store in the refrigerator for about three to four weeks, and use to treat sunburn, minor burns, and insect bites.



## Rosemary oil

$\frac{1}{2}$  lb (250 g) dried rosemary sprigs (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), or 1 lb (500 g) fresh herbs, finely chopped

3 cups (750 ml) olive, sunflower, or other good-quality vegetable oil

**METHOD** Stir herbs and oil together in a glass bowl over a saucepan of boiling water. Cover and simmer gently for two to three hours—do not let it boil dry. Cool the oil, strain, then pour into glass bottles, seal, and label. Place in a cool place out of direct light. The oil will keep for up to a year. This hot oil is good for aches and pains.



## Medicinal infusions

1 tsp dried herb or 2 tsp fresh herb per teacup  
Freshly boiled water

**METHOD** Place the herb leaves or flowers in a cup and pour over freshly boiled water. The water should be just below boiling, to avoid the valuable plant oils evaporating in the steam. Cover and infuse for five to ten minutes, then strain. Sweeten with honey if desired. Some herbs are too strong to be taken daily; always check the recommended dosage and quantity. Do not drink more than two cups of any one medicinal herb in 24 hours, except under guidance from a qualified herbal practitioner.



**WARNING** None of the plants marked \* should be taken during pregnancy. See individual herbs (pages 74–215) for further cautionary notes and information.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Bergamot** (*Monarda fistulosa*) for nausea and flatulence. Use four fresh leaves or 1 teaspoon of dried herb per cup.

**Cardamom** (*Elettaria cardamomum*) for indigestion after a meal. Use 4 crushed seeds per cup.

**\*Catnip** (*Nepeta cataria*) for a chill, rhinitis, or insomnia. Use five fresh leaves or 1 teaspoon of dried herb per cup.

**Chamomile** (*Chamaemelum nobile*) for insomnia. Use four fresh flowers per cup.

**Dill** (*Anethum graveolens*) for stomach pains and indigestion. Use 1 tsp of crushed seeds per cup.

**Fennel** (*Foeniculum vulgare*) for indigestion and as a diuretic. Use 1 tsp crushed seeds per cup.

**\*Gotu kola** (*Centella asiatica*) is a diuretic that cleanses toxins (see

page 103). Use 1 tsp dried leaves per cup; infuse for 15 minutes and strain.

**\*Hyssop** (*Hyssopus officinalis*) for coughs and rhinitis. Use 1 tsp dried or 2 tsp fresh leaves per cup.

**Lemon balm** (*Melissa officinalis*) for tension, headaches, and upset stomachs. Use five fresh leaves per cup.

**Lemon verbena** (*Aloysia triphylla*) for insomnia and nasal congestion. Use five fresh leaves or 1 tsp dried leaves per cup. Serve cold in summer.

**Peppermint** (*Mentha x piperita*) for indigestion. Use five fresh leaves or 1 tsp dried leaves per cup.

**Rosemary** (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) for halitosis, and to improve concentration. Use 2 in (5 cm) of a rosemary sprig or 1 tsp dried leaves per cup. Drink no more than one cup a day.

# Herbs for beauty

Herbs have been used cosmetically for thousands of years. The ancient Egyptians perfumed their hair with marjoram oil, and used many other herbs in beauty preparations, and for ceremonial occasions and religious rituals. Roman soldiers also used fragrant herb oils, such as lavender, to rub into their skin after bathing. This acted as an insect repellent, and helped heal skin wounds after battle.

Today, a whole commercial industry is based around beauty products, and it is big business. Many such products contain chemical preservatives, synthetic perfumes, and artificial colorings, but by making your own cosmetics, you can ensure control over the purity of the ingredients. You can also experiment with the

various herbal ingredients to find the combinations that work best on your skin and hair, as well as the fragrances that you like best. There are also therapeutic reasons for using herbs in your daily beauty routine, and their wonderful herbal aroma will promote a sense of well-being when you use them.

## Toning face pack

2 tbsp (30 ml) dried lady's mantle leaves and flowers,  
dried spearmint leaves, and dried mallow leaves

1 tsp crushed fennel seed

1 tsp crushed juniper berries

1 pint (575 ml) water

2 tbsp ground oatmeal, almonds, or Fuller's earth

**METHOD** Combine the herbs in a saucepan with the water. Cover, bring to a boil, and simmer for 15 minutes. Remove from the heat, strain, and cool. Put the ground oatmeal in a bowl. Add two to three tablespoons of the herbal infusion and mix well to form a paste. Spread fairly thickly over your face, avoiding the area around your eyes and mouth. Leave for ten minutes. Rinse with warm water. Use once or twice a week to tone the skin.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**For oily skin:** Chamomile, yarrow, parsley, and peppermint to equal either two handfuls of fresh leaves or 2 tbsp of dried herbs.

**For dry skin:** Two handfuls of fresh houseleek, mallow, and borage leaves, or 2 tbsp of dried herbs and 1 tsp of crushed flax seed.







## Facial steam

3 tbsp dried herbs, comprising equal parts chamomile, chervil, lavender, lemon balm, spearmint, curly mint, and thyme

3 pints (1.5 l) freshly boiled water

**WARNING** Avoid facial steams if your skin is very dry or has visible red veins, or if you suffer from a heart condition or asthma.

**METHOD** Place the herbs in a bowl; pour in the slightly cooled, boiled water. Hold your face over the steam at a distance of 12 in (30 cm), or 18 in (45 cm) for those with sensitive skin. Cover your head, shoulders, and the bowl with a bath towel, and inhale for five to ten minutes. Rinse your face with tepid water, then splash with cold water. To close up pores, dab on an infusion (see page 241) of elderflower or peppermint with cotton balls.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**For oily skin:** Pot marigold flowers, dried horsetail, sage leaves, and yarrow leaves.

**For mature skin:** Dried elderflowers and tansy flowers, plus dried tansy and lemon verbena leaves.

## Hair shampoo

1 tsp dried soapwort root or 10 fresh soapwort stems with leaves each 6–8 in (15–20 cm) long  
1½ pint (850 ml) water

**METHOD** Soapwort makes a slight lather when added to water, but it does not sting the eyes like some synthetic shampoos. You can use soapwort on its own or combine it with other herbs that benefit your hair type (see Herb Alternatives). Crush the soapwort root or roughly chop up the fresh stems. If you use dried soapwort, soak the root overnight in water. Put the soapwort and other herbs in a saucepan with the water, cover, bring to a boil, and simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from the heat, cool, and then strain the liquid through a fine strainer or cheesecloth. Store the shampoo solution out of direct light, for up to one week.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**For oily hair:** Add 1 tbsp dried or 10 leaves of fresh peppermint or spearmint; 1 tbsp dried or one sprig fresh rosemary; 1 tsp dried sage or three leaves of fresh sage.

**For dry hair:** Add 1 tbsp dried or ten leaves fresh mallow, chamomile, or sweet marjoram, or 1 tbsp dried or one sprig of fresh rosemary.



# Herbs for relaxation

As the Greek physician Theophrastus noted, fragrant herbs have an instant healing effect because the smell travels directly from the nerves in the nose to the part of the brain concerned with intuition, emotion, and creativity. He noted that when an aromatic herb poultice was applied to a leg, it could produce fragrant breath because its essences would permeate the skin and enter the circulatory system.

A warm bath infused with herb oils or dried herb ingredients helps relaxation and has a soothing effect on the nervous system. By adding herbs to warm water, we are encouraging them to release their natural oils, which in turn help us relax our body and mind. As you stretch out in the bathtub, breathe in deeply and inhale the

herbs and then slowly exhale several times to get the maximum benefit. When you have been sitting in front of a computer all day, an eye compress is relaxing, and an herb or a hop pillow is a great remedy if you have a racing mind and cannot sleep; simply smelling the herbs and imagining a warm summer's day does the trick.



## Bath tonic

1 large handful of common thyme stems and leaves  
1 pint (575ml) water

**METHOD** I do not think that I could cope with the strenuous work on my farm without being able to soak in a relaxing herbal bath at the end of a hard day. It not only washes away the physical aches and pains, but also restores my equilibrium. This is one recipe I use frequently to alleviate backache. Place the thyme sprigs into the saucepan of water. Cover, bring to a boil, lower the heat, and simmer for ten minutes. Remove the infusion from the heat and carefully strain the herbs—it is not romantic to have leaves floating in the bathwater because when you get out they stick to the skin. Add the thyme infusion to a hot bath and soak.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Lemon balm leaves** relieve insomnia and soothe the nerves. Use two large handfuls of fresh leaves, and simmer for five minutes.

**Basil and sweet marjoram leaves** relieve muscle cramps. Use two large handfuls (one of each herb) of fresh leaves, and simmer for five minutes.



## Bath bag

2 tbs (30ml) dried or 6 fresh chamomile flowers  
 2 tbs (30ml) dried or 6 sprigs of fresh lavender  
 2 tbs (30ml) dried or 6 fresh female hop flowers

**METHOD** One of the easiest ways of adding herbs to a bath is to hang a small cloth bag under the hot water faucet. Fill the bag with either a single dried herb or a mixture of herbs, and run the hot water through it to infuse the water and the air in the bathroom with herbs.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Eau-de-cologne mint**—one generous bunch of the fresh or dried herb makes a refreshing bath.

**Chamomile, valerian, rosemary, horsetail, and peppermint**—one large handful of each of the fresh or dried herbs mixed together makes a very soothing bath.

## Hop pillow

2 handfuls dried female hop flowers  
 1 handful dried chamomile flowers  
 1 handful dried lemon verbena leaves

**METHOD** Hop pillows are well known for their ability to aid sleep. If you do not like the beerlike aroma, mix them with other, more aromatic herbs, such as chamomile flowers and lemon verbena leaves. This will not detract from the hops' sleep-inducing properties. To make the herb pillow, sew a small cotton cover, fill it with the dried herbs, and stitch it up. It will last for up to six months.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Sweet marjoram leaves and lavender sprigs**—Mix one handful of each dried herb to induce sleep and to lift the spirits.

**Chamomile flowers and rosemary sprigs**—Mix one handful of each dried herb to prevent nightmares and to refresh the mind and body.

## Relaxing eye compress

5 leaves or 1 tsp dried mint leaves  
 1 cup (200ml) water

**METHOD** Place the herbs in a ceramic bowl, pour in freshly boiled water, cover, and allow to infuse for ten minutes. Strain through an unbleached coffee filter paper and leave it to cool. To reduce dark circles under the eyes, dip two cotton pads in the liquid and place on the eyelids for 10–15 minutes.

### HERB ALTERNATIVES

**Cornflowers** soothe the eyes and reduce puffiness in the eye area. Use one handful of fresh or dried flowers..

**Fennel leaves** reduce inflammation and brighten eyes. Use 1 tsp of crushed dried herb.

**WARNING** Eyes are very delicate. Before use, test the solution on a tender patch of skin, such as the underarm, for an allergic reaction.





# Herbs for pet care

Wild animals naturally turn to herbs if they are feeling unwell. Our domesticated animals have not lost this instinct and will treat themselves if, for example, they get a burr stuck in their throat by eating grass. We can use herbs to alleviate our pets' simple ailments. For instance, you can add parsley to a dog's diet to cure bad breath, or rub his coat with tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) to deter fleas.

Cats and dogs and other small creatures have much shorter digestive systems than humans, and do not digest fresh herbs in the same way as we do. For this reason, it is easier and safer to administer herbs to pets either as a herbal infusion or as drops of herb tincture; either can be added to drinking water or food. Make the

doses compatible with your pet's size—small amounts for small animals, larger amounts for large animals. I use a drop of valerian tincture on a dog biscuit to calm my dog, Hampton, before long car trips. But if your pet is unwell, consult a qualified vet for advice and treatment rather than attempting to treat it with herbs.



## Flea powder

1 tsp dried rosemary  
1 tsp fennel seeds, crushed  
1 tsp dried wormwood  
1 tsp dried rue

**METHOD** Mix together the dried herb ingredients, and comb sparingly into your pet's hair. Alternatively, you can pick a handful of tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) and rub your pet's coat with the crushed leaves. This will soothe your pet and deters fleas. Alternatively, you can bathe your dog in a strong rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) infusion (see page 241). This infusion can also be used to wash your dog's bedding and to soak its collar—both are effective ways to deter fleas.

## Lice deterrent

**METHOD** Free-range hens will control their own lice infestations by taking dust baths. You can help control lice in a coop by hanging large bunches of dried wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) inside the coop and placing dried leaves in the hens' bedding straw. Dried bunches of pyrethrum (*Tanacetum cinerariifolium*) will deter flies, and tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) will deter mice.

## Calming tonic

**METHOD** Pets, like humans, can be frightened by thunderstorms, car travel, or loud noises. Here, a hamster is being given a few drops of chamomile tea (*Chamaemelum nobile*). It calms the nerves and is an excellent cleanser and toner of the digestive tract, helping expel worms and parasites and thereby improve the appetite. It also helps control dry, flaking skin. For cats, add one tablespoon of chamomile tea to their food; for dogs, up to three tablespoons, depending on their size. Another calmative is valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), which works well for anxious cats. Cats are notoriously fussy about their food, but are partial to valerian, which reduces anxiety and soothes the nervous system. Add three to four drops of valerian tisane to food using a dropper.



## Cat toy

**METHOD** My two cats both adore the two species of catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) and (*Nepeta x faassenii*). They can be found lying outdoors in ecstasy among the fresh plants in summer. To give them year-round pleasure, dry catnip leaves and use them to fill a small cat toy, or make a small cotton sachet and sew it up.

## Worming mixture

½–1 raw garlic clove, grated  
or minced (depending on pet's size)  
1 tsp–2 tbsp of brewer's yeast powder  
(depending on pet's size)

**WARNING** This mixture is not suitable for dogs under six months old.

**METHOD** Garlic is very beneficial for dogs, acting as a wormer, a flea deterrent, and an all-round tonic for the immune and cardiovascular systems. Some dogs are happy to eat garlic grated onto their food, but others will refuse it. To disguise the aroma of garlic, add brewers' yeast to it to make a more palatable worming mixture, which is also good for conditioning your dog's coat.



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# Resources

## **Jekka's Herb Farm**

Rose Cottage, Shellards Lane,  
Alveston, Bristol, BS35 3SY  
Tel: (011-44)1454 418878  
[www.jekkaferbfarm.com](http://www.jekkaferbfarm.com)

Please visit our website for details of our farm's open weekends and our newsletters and other information on herb and organic gardening.

## **The Herb Society of America**

9019 Kirtland Chardon Road  
Kirtland, OH 44094  
Tel: (440) 256-0514  
[www.herbsociety.org](http://www.herbsociety.org)

The primary source of information on the cultivation and culinary use of herbs and their benefits to health.

## **National Herb Garden**

The United States National Arboretum  
3501 New York Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-1958  
Tel: (202) 245-2726  
[www.usna.usda.gov](http://www.usna.usda.gov)

The National Herb Garden was a gift from the Herb Society of America to the American people, on two and a half acres of the USA National Arboretum. It was started in 1980, to provide the public with an opportunity to see, enjoy, and learn about herbs.

In addition, the following herb gardens can be visited and provide additional information:

## **The Cloisters Medieval Herb Garden**

Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Fort Tryon Park, NY 10040  
Tel: (212) 233-3799

[www.metmuseum.org/cloisters](http://www.metmuseum.org/cloisters)

Over 250 species of herbs that were grown during the Middle Ages for culinary and medicinal use

## **Huntington Botanical Gardens**

1151 Oxford Road  
San Marino, CA 91108  
Tel: (818)405-2100  
[www.huntington.org](http://www.huntington.org)

An extensive collection of herbs planted in a series of specialty gardens.

## **Matthaei Botanical Garden**

The University of Michigan  
1800 North Dixboro Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48105  
Tel: (734) 647-7600

[www.mbgna.umich.edu](http://www.mbgna.umich.edu)

A traditional herb garden that includes a knot garden and a broad range of herbs.

## **Montréal Botanical Gardens**

4101, Rue Sherbrooke Est  
Montréal, Québec  
Canada H1X 2B2  
Tel: (514) 872-1400

[www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin](http://www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin)

Among more than 21,000 species and cultivars, extensive collections of economic plants and herbs in the outdoor and conservatory gardens.

## **Robison York State Herb Garden**

Cornell Plantations  
1 Plantation Road  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
Tel: (607) 255-3020

[www.cornellplantations.org](http://www.cornellplantations.org)

A series of herb gardens, with a broad range of native herbs.

## **VanDusen Botanical Garden**

5251 Oak Street  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
Canada V6M 4H1  
[www.vandusen.org](http://www.vandusen.org)

One of the world's most important botanic gardens, with more than 6,500 plants from six continents, where many mature herb species can be seen grown to full size.

## **Western Reserve Herb Society Herb Garden**

Cleveland Botanical Garden  
11030 East Boulevard  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
Tel: (216) 721-1600

[www.cb garden.org](http://www.cb garden.org)

More than 40 years old, this world-famous garden was founded, and is tended, by a unit of the Herb Society of America. Knot, dye, culinary, and fragrance gardens.

# Further reading

## Deni Bown

*The Herb Society of America  
New Encyclopedia of Herbs  
& Their Uses*  
DK Publishing

## Andrew Chevallier

*Encyclopedia of  
Medicinal Plants*  
DK Publishing

## John Gerard

*Herbal*  
Bracken Books

## A.M. Grieve

*Modern Herbal*  
Peregrine Books

## Lawrence D. Hills

*Guide to Organic Gardening,  
Month by Month*  
Thorsons Books

## Home Herbal

DK Publishing

## McVicar, Jekka

*Jekka's Complete Herb Book*  
Kyle Cathie Ltd

## McVicar, Jekka

*Seeds: the ultimate guide to  
growing successfully from seed*  
Kyle Cathie Ltd (with the RHS)

## Penelope Ody

*Home Herbal*  
DK Publishing

## Pauline Pears

*Rodale Encyclopedia of  
Organic Gardening*  
DK Publishing

## Directories

*RHS Plant Finder*

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Also available at [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)

*The Seed Search*

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